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DISCOURSES

PREACHED AT

THE TEMPLE CHURCH,

AND ON

SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

DISCOURSES

ON THE

USE AND INTENT OF PROPHECY:

TOGETHER WITH

DISSERTATIONS;

A CHARGE TO THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF LONDON;

A LETTER ON THE EARTHQUAKES IN MDCCL;

AND

THE TRIAL OF THE WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

BY

THOMAS SHERLOCK, D. D.

LATE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON, AND MASTER OF THE TEMPLE.

A NEW EDITION, IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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DISCOURSE I.

PART I.

JOHN vi. 67—69.

Then ſaid Jeſus unto the twelve, Will ye alſo go away? Then Simon Peter anſwered him, Lord, to whom ſhall we go? thou haſt the words of eternal life. And we believe and are ſure that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.

IN the foregoing part of this chapter we read, that the doctrine of our Saviour had given ſuch offence to his hearers, that many even of his diſciples went back, and walked no more with him: upon which occaſion our Saviour put this queſtion to the twelve, *Will ye alſo go away?* To which St. Peter, in the name of all, made anſwer, *Lord, to whom ſhall we go? thou haſt the words of eternal life. And we believe and are ſure that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.* In this anſwer there are three things expreſſed, or implied, as the ground of their conſtancy and adherence to Chriſt:

I. The firſt is, The miſerable condition they ſhould be in if they did forſake him, having no other in whom they could truſt: *Lord, to whom ſhall we go?*

II. The ſecond is, The excellency of his religion, and the certain means it afforded of obtaining that which is the great end of religion, a bleſſed life after this: *Thou haſt the words of eternal life.*

III. The third is, The authority and divine commiſſion of Chriſt, upon which their faith and confidence were built: *We believe and are ſure that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.* To believe, becauſe we have ſufficient reaſon to determine our belief, is a rational faith; and this is what is meant in the word ἐγνώκαμεν: *We believe,* becauſe we have, from the things we have heard and ſeen of you, determined with ourſelves, *that thou art the Chriſt, the Son of the living God.*

Theſe three reaſons, which St. Peter gives for adherence to Chriſt, refer to as many general principles or maxims:

As firſt, that religion, the only means by which men can arrive at true happineſs, by which they can attain to the laſt perfection and dignity of their nature, does not, in the preſent circumſtances of the world, depend on human reaſoning or inventions: for, was this the caſe, we need not to go from home for religion, or to ſeek farther than our own breaſt for the means of reconciling ourſelves to God, and obtaining his favour, and, in conſequence of it, life eternal. Upon ſuch ſuppoſition, St. Peter argued very weakly, in ſaying, *To whom ſhall we go?* For to whom need they go to learn that which they were well able to teach themſelves?

The ſecond principle referred to is, that the great end of religion is future happineſs; and con-

ſequently the beſt religion is that which will moſt ſurely direct us to eternal life. Upon this ground St. Peter prefers the Goſpel of Chriſt: *Thou haſt the words of eternal life.*

The third thing is, that the authority and word of God is the only ſure foundation of religion, and the only reaſonable ground for us to build our hopes on. Thus St. Peter accounts for his confidence in the religion which Chriſt taught: *We know and are ſure that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.*

In this ſtate of the caſe, the neceſſity of religion in general is ſuppoſed; and the only queſtion is, from what fountain we muſt derive it. The diſpute can only lie between natural and revealed religion. If nature be able to direct us, it will be hard to juſtify the wiſdom of God in giving us a revelation, ſince the revelation can only ſerve the ſame purpoſe, which nature alone could well ſupply.

Since the light of the Goſpel has ſhone throughout the world, nature has been much improving; we ſee many things clearly, many things which reaſon readily embraces, which nevertheleſs the world before was generally a ſtranger to. The Goſpel has given us true notions of God and of ourſelves, right conceptions of his holineſs and purity, and of the nature of divine worſhip: it has taught us a religion, in the practice of which our preſent eaſe and comfort, and our hopes of future happineſs and glory, conſiſt; it has reſcued us from idolatry and ſuperſtition; and, by inſtructing us in the nature of God, and diſcovering to us his will, has

omnipreſence, and infinite knowledge, it has furniſhed us even with principles of reaſon, by which we reject and condemn the rites and ceremonies of heatheniſm and idolatry, and diſcover wherein the beauty and holineſs of divine worſhip conſiſt: for the nature of divine worſhip muſt be deduced from the nature of God; and it is impoſſible for men to pay a reaſonable ſervice to God, till they have juſt and reaſonable notions of him. But now, it ſeems, this is all become pure natural religion; and it is to our own reaſon and underſtanding that we are indebted for the notion of God and of divine worſhip: and whatever elſe in religion is agreeable to our reaſon, is reckoned to proceed entirely from it: and, had the unbelievers of this age heard St. Peter's piteous complaint, *Lord, to whom ſhall we go?* they would have bid him go to himſelf, and conſult his own reaſon, and there he ſhould find all that was worth finding in religion.

But let us, if you pleaſe, examine this pretence, and ſee upon what ground this plea of natural religion can be maintained. If nature can inſtruct us ſufficiently in religion, we have indeed no reaſon to go any where elſe; ſo far we are agreed: but whether nature can or no, is, in truth, rather a queſtion of fact, than mere ſpeculation; for the way to know what nature can do, is to take nature by itſelf, and try its ſtrength alone. There was a time when men had little elſe but nature to go to; and that is the proper time to look into, to ſee what mere and unaſſiſted nature can do in religion. Nay, there are ſtill nations under the ſun, who are, as to religion, in a mere ſtate of nature: the glad

tidings of the Goſpel have not reached them, nor have they been bleſſed, or (to ſpeak in the modern phraſe) *prejudiced* with divine revelations, which we, leſs worthy of them than they, ſo much complain of: in other matters they are polite and civilized; they are cunning traders, fine artificers, and in many arts and ſciences not unſkilful. Here then we may hope to ſee natural religion in its full perfection; for there is no want of natural reaſon, nor any room to complain of prejudices or prepoſſeſſion: but yet, alas! theſe nations are held in the chains of darkneſs, and given up to the blindeſt ſuperſtition and idolatry. Men wanted not reaſon before the coming of Chriſt, nor opportunity nor inclination to improve it: arts and ſciences had long before obtained their juſt perfection; the number of the ſtars had been counted, and their motions obſerved and adjuſted; the philoſophy, oratory, and poetry of thoſe ages are ſtill the delight and entertainment of this. Religion was not the leaſt part of their inquiry; they ſearched all the receſſes of reaſon and nature; and, had it been in the power of reaſon and nature to furniſh men with juſt notions and principles of religion, here we ſhould have found them: but, inſtead of them, we find nothing but the groſſeſt ſuperſtition and idolatry; the creatures of the earth advanced into deities, and men degenerating and making themſelves lower than the beaſts of the field. Time would fail me to tell of the corruptions and extravagances of the politeſt nations. Their religion was their reproach, and the ſervice they paid their gods was a diſhonour to them and to themſelves:

the moſt ſacred part of their devotion was the moſt impure; and the only thing that was commendable in it is, that it was kept as a great myſtery and ſecret, and hid under the darkneſs of the night; and, was reaſon now to judge, it would approve of nothing in this religion, but the modeſty of withdrawing itſelf from the eyes of the world.

This being the caſe wherever men have been left to mere reaſon and nature to direct them; what ſecurity have the great patrons of natural religion now, that, were they left only to reaſon and nature, they ſhould not run into the ſame errors and abſurdities? Have they more reaſon than thoſe who have gone before them? In all other inſtances nature is the ſame now that ever it was, and we are but acting over again the ſame part that our anceſtors acted before us: wiſdom and prudence and cunning are now what they formerly were; nor can this age ſhew human nature in any one character exalted beyond the examples which antiquity has left us. Can we ſhew greater inſtances of civil and political wiſdom than are to be found in the governments of Greece and Rome? Are not the civil laws of Rome ſtill had in admiration? and have they not a place allowed them ſtill in almoſt all kingdoms? Since then in nothing elſe we are grown wiſer than the heathen world, what probability is there that we ſhould have grown wiſer in religion, if we had been left, as they were, to mere reaſon and nature? To this day there is no alteration for the better, except only in the countries where the Goſpel has been preached. What ſhall we ſay of the Chineſe, a nation that wants not

either reaſon or learning, and in ſome parts of it pretends to excel the world? They have been daily improving in the arts of life, and in every kind of knowledge and ſcience; but yet in religion they are ignorant and ſuperſtitious, and have but very little of what we call natural religion among them: and what ground is there to imagine that reaſon would have done more, made greater diſcoveries of truth, or more entirely ſubdued the paſſions of men, in England or France, or any other country of Europe, than it has in the eaſtern or ſouthern parts of the world? Are not men as reaſonable creatures in the eaſt, as they are in the weſt? and have not they the ſame means of exerciſing and improving their reaſon too? Why then ſhould you think that reaſon would do that now in this place, which it has never yet been able to do in any time or place whatever?

This fact is ſo very plain and undeniable, that I cannot but think, that, would men conſider it fairly, they would ſoon be convinced how much they are indebted to the revelation of the Goſpel, even for that natural religion which they ſo fondly boaſt of: for how comes it to paſs, that there is ſo much reaſon, ſuch clear natural religion, in every country where the Goſpel is profeſſed, and ſo little of both every where elſe?

But is there then, you will ſay, no ſuch thing as natural religion? Does not St. Paul lay the heathen world under condemnation for not attending to the dictates of it? *Becauſe*, ſays he, *that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them; for God hath ſhewed it unto them. For the inviſible things*

of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; ſo that they are without excuſe: becauſe that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their fooliſh heart was darkened. Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beaſts, and creeping things.—A ſad account this of the ſtate of religion in the heathen world, and a manifeſt proof how much nature ſtands in need of aſſiſtance! What we learn from St. Paul is plainly this; That, notwithſtanding the care which God had taken to diſplay the evidences of his own being and godhead in every work of the creation, ſo that men could not but have a notion of the Deity; yet, ſo little did they profit by that knowledge, that it ſerved only to render them inexcuſable in their ſuperſtition and idolatry: for, when they *knew God*, (as indeed all the heathen world had a notion of a ſupreme Being,) yet they *glorified him not as God*; *but changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beaſts, and creeping things.* And was not nature an excellent guide to follow, that thus ſtumbled at the very threſhold; and, having from natural reaſon the notion of a ſupreme Deity, ſought to find him among the four-footed beaſts and creeping things of the earth? Can you ſay what it was that thus debaſed the reaſon and underſtanding of mankind? What evil was it that

had diffuſed itſelf through the whole race, and ſo poſſeſſed their ſenſes, that *ſeeing they did not perceive, and hearing they did not underſtand?* Or, do you think that you alone are exempt from this common, this univerſal blindneſs, and that the ſame reaſon and nature, that hitherto have miſguided all the world into error and idolatry, would lead you, out of the common road, into truth and pure religion?

Is it not the utmoſt preſumption to think thus, and to imagine that we alone are able to ſurmount the difficulties which all the world before us has ſunk under? And yet thus every man muſt think, who ſets up natural religion in oppoſition to revelation: for has mere nature ever yet, in any one part of the world, extricated itſelf from error? Do the nations of old, or thoſe which now are, afford any inſtance of this kind? But ſtill you think that nature is ſufficient to direct you; and what elſe is this but to diſtinguiſh yourſelf from all the world, as if you only were privileged againſt the common failings and corruptions of mankind?

But you will ſay, Are there not complete ſchemes of natural religion drawn from principles and axioms of reaſon, without calling in the help of revelation? and are they not evident demonſtrations that nature is able to furniſh us with a religion that is pure and holy, and agreeable to the divine attributes? Allow this; but let us then be informed how it came to paſs, that never any ſyſtem of this pure religion was in uſe and practice in any nation, or indeed ever fully diſcovered, till the Goſpel had enlightened the world. You may boaſt

of Socrates and Plato, and ſome few others in the heathen world, and tell us perhaps of their great attainments upon the ſtrength of mere reaſon. Be it ſo. But what is this to the preſent queſtion? Muſt millions in every age of the world be left in ignorance, becauſe five or ſix among them may happen to extricate themſelves? Would it be reaſonable to ſuffer a whole nation to periſh without help in a plague, becauſe ſome few were not tainted with the diſtemper? Or, will you ſay all men are ſeven feet high, becauſe we ſee now-and-then ſome who are?

I queſtion not but the wiſe Creator of the world formed us for his own ſervice, and that he gave us whatever was requiſite either to the knowledge or the performance of our duty: and that there are ſtill in nature the ſeeds and principles of religion, however buried under the rubbiſh of ignorance and ſuperſtition, I as little queſtion. But what was it, I beſeech you, that oppreſſed this light of reaſon and nature for ſo many ages? and what is it that has now ſet it free? Whatever the diſtemper was, nature plainly wanted aſſiſtance, being unable to diſengage herſelf from the bonds and fetters in which ſhe was held: we may diſagree perhaps in finding a name for this evil, this general corruption of nature; but the thing itſelf is evident; the impotence of nature ſtands confeſſed; the blindneſs, the ignorance of the heathen world are too plain a proof of it. This general corruption and weakneſs of nature made it neceſſary that religion ſhould be reſtored by ſome other means, and that men ſhould have other helps to reſort to, beſides their own

ſtrength and reaſon. And, if natural religion is indeed arrived to that ſtate of perfection ſo much boaſted of, it gives a ſtrong teſtimony to the Goſpel, and evidently proves it to be an adequate remedy and ſupport againſt the evil and corruption of nature. For, where the Goſpel prevails, nature is reſtored; and reaſon, delivered from bondage by grace, ſees and approves what is holy, juſt, and pure: for what elſe can it be aſcribed to, but the power of the Goſpel, that, in every nation that names the name of Chriſt, even reaſon and nature ſee and condemn the follies, which others ſtill, for want of the ſame help, are held in ſubjection to?

Can this truth be evaded or denied? And what a return then do we make for the bleſſing we have received? and how deſpitefully do we treat the Goſpel of Chriſt, to which we owe that clear light even of reaſon and nature which we now enjoy, when we endeavour to ſet up reaſon and nature in oppoſition to it? Ought the withered hand, which Chriſt has reſtored and made whole, to be lifted up againſt him? or ſhould the dumb man's tongue, juſt looſened from the bonds of ſilence, blaſpheme the power that ſet it free? Yet thus fooliſhly do we ſin, when we make natural religion the engine to batter down the Goſpel; for the Goſpel only could, and only has reſtored the religion of nature: and therefore there is a kind of parricide in the attempt, and an infidelity heightened by the aggravating circumſtance of unnatural baſeneſs and diſingenuity.

Nor will the ſucceſs of the attempt be much greater than the wiſdom and the piety of it: for,

when once nature leaves her faithful guide, the Goſpel of Chriſt, it will be as unable to ſupport itſelf againſt error and ſuperſtition, as it was to deliver itſelf from them, and will by degrees fall back into its original blindneſs and corruption. Had you a view of the diſputes that ariſe even upon the principles of natural religion, it would ſhew you what the end will be; for the wanderings of human reaſon are infinite. Under the Goſpel diſpenſation we have the immutable word of God for the ſupport of our faith and hope. We know in whom we have believed; in him, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived; and, poor as our ſervices are, we have his word for it, that our labour of love ſhall not be forgotten. But to them who rely on nature only, it is not evident, nor can it be, whether any future reward ſhall attend their religious ſervice. Well therefore did St. Peter ſay to Chriſt, *Thou haſt the words of eternal life*; for no other religion can give any ſecurity of life and happineſs to its votaries. Whither then ſhall we go from Chriſt, or to whom ſhall we ſeek for ſuccour, ſince he only has the words of eternal life?

DISCOURSE I.

PART II.

THE ſecond thing to be conſidered is, that the excellency of religion conſiſts in affording certain means of obtaining eternal life.

Religion is founded in the principles of reaſon and nature; and, without ſuppoſing this foundation, it would be as rational an act to preach to horſes as to men. A man, who has the uſe of reaſon, cannot conſider his condition and circumſtances in this world, or reflect upon his notions of good and evil, and the ſenſe he feels in himſelf that he is an accountable creature for the good or evil he does, without aſking himſelf, how he came into this world, and for what purpoſe, and to whom it is that he is, or poſſibly may be, accountable. When, by tracing his own being to the original, he finds that there is one ſupreme all-wiſe cauſe of all things; when by experience he ſees, that this world neither is, nor can be, the place for taking a juſt and adequate account of the actions of men; the preſumption that there is another ſtate after this, in which men ſhall live, grows ſtrong and almoſt irreſiſtible: when he conſiders farther the fears and hopes of nature with reſpect to futurity, the fear of death

common to all, the deſire of continuing in being which never forſakes us; and reflects for what uſe and purpoſe theſe ſtrong impreſſions were given us by the Author of nature; he cannot help concluding that man was made not merely to act a ſhort part upon the ſtage of this world, but that there is another and more laſting ſtate, to which he bears relation. And from hence it muſt neceſſarily follow, that his religion muſt be formed on a view of ſecuring a future happineſs.

Since then the end that men propoſe to themſelves by religion is ſuch, it will teach us wherein the true excellency of religion conſiſts. If eternal life and future happineſs are what we aim at, that will be the beſt religion, which will moſt certainly lead us to eternal life and future happineſs: and it will be to no purpoſe to compare religions together in any other reſpects, which have no relation to this end.

Let us then by this rule examine the pretenſions of revelation, and, as we go along, compare it with the preſent ſtate of natural religion, that we may be able to judge, *to whom we ought to go.*

Eternal life and happineſs are out of our power to give ourſelves, or to obtain by any ſtrength and force, or any policy or wiſdom. Could our own arm reſcue us from the jaws of death and the powers of the kingdom of darkneſs; could we ſet open the gates of heaven for ourſelves, and enter in to take poſſeſſion of life and glory; we ſhould want no inſtructions or aſſiſtances from religion; ſince what St. Peter ſaid of Chriſt every man might ap-

ply to himſelf, and ſay, *I have the words, or means, of eternal life.*

But, ſince we have not this power of life and death; and ſince there is One who has, who governeth all things in heaven and in earth, who is over all God bleſſed for evermore; it neceſſarily follows, that either we muſt have no ſhare or lot in the glories of futurity, or elſe that we muſt obtain them from God, and receive them as his gift and favour: and conſequently, if eternal life be the end of religion, and likewiſe the gift of God, religion can be nothing elſe but the means proper to be made uſe of by us to obtain of God this moſt excellent and perfect gift of eternal life: for, if eternal life be the end of religion, religion muſt be the means of obtaining eternal life; and, if eternal life can only be had from the gift of God, religion muſt be the means of obtaining this gift from God.

And thus far all religions, that ever have appeared in the world, have agreed: the queſtion has never yet been made by any, whether God is to be applied to for eternal happineſs, or no; but every ſect has placed its excellency in this, that it teaches the propereſt and moſt effectual way of making this application. Even natural religion pretends to no more than this; it claims not eternal life as the right of nature, but as the right of obedience, and of obedience to God, the Lord of nature: and the diſpute between natural and revealed religion is not, whether God is to be applied to for eternal happineſs; but only, whether nature or revelation can beſt teach us how to make this application.

Prayers, and praiſes, and repentance for ſins paſt, are acts of devotion, which nature pretends to inſtruct and direct us in. But why does ſhe teach us to pray, to praiſe, or to repent, but that ſhe eſteems one to be the proper method of expreſſing our wants, the other of expreſſing our gratitude, and the third of making atonement for iniquity and offences againſt God? In all theſe acts reference is had to the overruling power of the Almighty; and they amount to this confeſſion, that the upſhot of all religion is to pleaſe God in order to make ourſelves happy.

This will ſhew us what muſt neceſſarily be underſtood by any perſon's, or by any religion's, *having the words of eternal life:* for, ſince eternal life can only be had by pleaſing God, no perſon, no religion, can be ſaid to have the words of eternal life upon any other account, than becauſe it teaches and enables us ſo far at leaſt to pleaſe God, as to obtain eternal life from him.

If we conſider God as the ruler of this world as well as of the next, religion indeed will be as neceſſary a means of obtaining the bleſſings of this life, as of that which is to come. But this will make no alteration in the nature of religion: for, if the bleſſings of this life are the gift of God, they muſt be obtained by pleaſing God; and the ſame ſervices muſt entitle us to the bleſſings of this life and of the next, unleſs you can ſuppoſe that there are different ways of pleaſing God; one way to pleaſe him, in order to obtain the bleſſings of this world; and another, in order to obtain the bleſſings of heaven.

From this account of the nature of religion, that it is the knowledge of pleaſing God, and ſerving him acceptably, (I ſpeak of religion now conſidered only as a rule,) there are ſome conſequences which naturally follow, that may be of great ſervice to us in directing us in our choice of religion.

Firſt then; Since it is the perfection of religion to inſtruct us how to pleaſe God; and ſince to pleaſe God, and to act according to the will of God, are but one and the ſame thing; it neceſſarily follows, that muſt be the moſt perfect religion, which does moſt perfectly inſtruct us in the knowledge of the will of God. Allow then Nature to have all the advantages that ever the greateſt patrons of natural religion laid claim to on her behalf; allow Reaſon to be as clear, as uncorrupted, as unprejudiced, as even our fondeſt wiſhes would make it; yet ſtill it can never be ſuppoſed, that Nature and Reaſon, in all their glory, can be able to know the will of God ſo well as he himſelf knows it: and therefore, ſhould God ever make a declaration of his will, that declaration muſt, according to the nature and neceſſity of the thing, be a more perfect rule for religion, than reaſon and nature can poſſibly furniſh us with. Had we the wiſdom and reaſon of cherubims and ſeraphims to direct us in the worſhip and ſervice of our Maker, nevertheleſs it would be our higheſt wiſdom, as it is theirs, to ſubmit to his laws, that is, to the declarations of his will.

Secondly; From hence it appears, how extremely wrong it is to compare natural religion and revelation together, in order to inquire which is

preferable; for it is neither more nor leſs than inquiring, whether we know God's will better than he himſelf knows it. Falſe revelations are no revelations; and therefore to prefer natural religion before ſuch pretended revelations, is only to reject a forgery: but to ſuppoſe that there is, or may be, a true revelation, and yet to ſay that natural religion is a better guide, is to ſay that we are wiſer than God, and know better how to pleaſe him without his directions than with them. Upon this ſtate of the caſe then, a revelation muſt be entirely rejected as a forgery, or entirely ſubmitted to; and the only debate between natural religion and revelation muſt be, whether we really have a revelation, or no; and not whether revelation or nature be, in the nature of things, the beſt and ſureſt foundation of religion: which diſpute but ill becomes our condition, and is a vain attempt to exalt ourſelves and our own reaſon *above every thing that is called God.*

Since then revelation, conſidered as ſuch, muſt needs be the ſureſt guide in religion, every reaſonable man is bound to conſider the pretenſions of revelation, when offered to him; for no man can juſtify himſelf in relying merely on natural religion, till he has ſatisfied himſelf that no better directions are to be had. For, ſince it is the buſineſs of religion to pleaſe God, is it not a very natural and a very reaſonable inquiry to make, whether God has any where declared what will pleaſe him? at leaſt, it is reaſonable when we are called to this inquiry, by having a revelation tendered to us, ſupported by ſuch evidence, which, though it may

be eaſily rejected without reaſon, yet to reaſon will ever approve itſelf.

But the inquiry into the evidence for any particular revelation is excluded by thoſe who argue againſt all revelation *a priori*, as being inconſiſtent with the wiſdom of God. What they ſay amounts to this; That God, having given us reaſon, has bound us to obey the dictates of reaſon, and tied himſelf down to judge us by that rule, and that only: to ſuppoſe otherwiſe, they imagine, would be to maintain that God gave us an imperfect rule at firſt, and which wanted to be mended; a thing, they imagine, inconſiſtent with his wiſdom: and, the rule of reaſon being ſufficient, all revelation, they judge, muſt be uſeleſs and impertinent, and conſequently can never derive itſelf from God. But, as it is too apparent to be denied, that reaſon and natural religion never did in any age univerſally prevail; to help out the argument, it is farther ſuppoſed, that whatever happens in the world is agreeable to the original deſign of God, and conſequently, that thoſe who have leaſt of reaſon and natural religion are in the ſtate for which God deſigned them; and, if ſo, it is abſurd to ſuppoſe a revelation ſhould be given, to take men out of that ſtate in which God originally deſigned to place them.

This is the ſum of the argument againſt revelation *a priori*: to conſider it particularly will take more time than can be allowed: but in brief we may obſerve,

1. That to argue, from the perfection of human reaſon, that we are diſcharged from receiving any

new laws from God, is inconſiſtent with as clear a principle of reaſon as any whatever, and which neceſſarily ariſes from the relation between God and man; which is, that the creature is bound to obey the Creator, in which way ſoever his will is made known to him: and this ſurely is true with reſpect to the higheſt order of beings, as well as to the loweſt; for this plea, now made for human reaſon, would be preſumptuous in the mouth of an angel, and inconſiſtent with the ſubjection he owes to God.

2. As to the perfection of human reaſon, it cannot be, nor, I ſuppoſe, will it be maintained, that human reaſon is abſolutely perfect; and therefore the meaning muſt be, that reaſon is relatively perfect, conſidered as the rule of our obedience. But this is true only upon ſuppoſition that reaſon is the only rule of our obedience; for, if there be any other rule beſides, mere reaſon cannot be the perfect rule of our obedience: and therefore this argument is really begging the thing in queſtion; for it ſuppoſes there is no other rule but reaſon, which is the thing not to be ſuppoſed, but to be proved. As much may be ſaid for every law, as is ſaid in this caſe for human reaſon: every law, being the only law in the caſe, is a perfect rule for the ſubject's obedience, becauſe the ſubject is bound to no more than the law requires: but, if the law be amended and enlarged by the ſame authority that made it, it is no longer a perfect rule of obedience; but, to make it ſuch, it muſt be taken jointly with the corrections and enlargements made by the proper authority.

3. Hence it follows, that to alter or add to a law once conſidered as a perfect rule of obedience, when an alteration of circumſtances requires it, is neither uſeleſs nor impertinent, but oftentimes the effect of wiſdom and neceſſity.

4. To ſay that revelation is unneceſſary, becauſe reaſon is a perfect rule, and at the ſame time to affirm that thoſe who have but an imperfect uſe of reaſon have no need of revelation, is a manifeſt contradiction: to ſay farther, that thoſe who are in ſuch a ſtate that actually they do not obey the laws of reaſon, and, morally ſpeaking, cannot obey, are nevertheleſs in ſuch a ſtate as God intended they ſhould be in, is not only making God the author of evil, but it is aſcribing to him two inconſiſtent intentions: for to argue that God gave men reaſon to be the rule of their obedience, is ſuppoſing that his original intention is, that men ſhould obey reaſon; to argue at the ſame time that thoſe who live in diſobedience to this law are in the ſtate which God intended them to be in, is to ſuppoſe that God intended the law ſhould be obeyed, and not obeyed, at the ſame time. But to return:

We are not now arguing in behalf of any particular revelation, which may be true or falſe for any thing that has hitherto been ſaid: but this I urge, that revelation is the ſureſt foundation of religion; and this wants no other proof than an explication of the terms: religion, conſidered as a rule, is the knowledge of ſerving and pleaſing God: revelation is the declaration of God, how he would be ſerved, and what will pleaſe him: and, unleſs we know

what will pleaſe God better than he himſelf does, revelation muſt be the beſt rule to ſerve and pleaſe God by, that is, it muſt be the beſt religion.

From hence then, I ſay, it is incumbent on every man of ſenſe and reaſon, upon every one who judges for himſelf in the choice of his religion, firſt to inquire whether there be a revelation, or no: nor can the precepts of natural religion ſingly be drawn into queſtion, till it is firſt certain that there is no revelation to direct us: and therefore there can be no compariſon ſtated generally between natural and revealed religion, in order to determine our choice between them; becauſe the revelation muſt be firſt rejected before natural religion can pretend to the ſole direction.

And yet this is the beaten path that unbelievers tread: they conſider in general, that revelation is ſubject to many uncertainties; it may be a cheat at firſt, or it may be corrupted afterwards, and not faithfully handed down to them; but in natural religion there can be no cheat, becauſe in that every man judges for himſelf, and is bound to nothing but what is agreeable to the dictates of reaſon and his own mind: and upon theſe general views they reject all revelations whatever, and adhere to natural religion as the ſafer guide. But attend to the conſequence of this reaſoning, which is this; that, becauſe there may be a falſe revelation, therefore there cannot be a true one: for, unleſs this conſequence be juſt, they are inexcuſable in rejecting all revelations, becauſe of the uncertainties which may attend them.

But now to apply what has been ſaid to the

Chriſtian revelation: it has ſuch pretences, at leaſt, as may make it worthy of a particular conſideration: it pretends to come from heaven; to have been delivered by the Son of God; to have been confirmed by undeniable miracles and prophecies; to have been ratified by the blood of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, who died in aſſerting its truth. It can ſhew likewiſe an innumerable company of martyrs and confeſſors: its doctrines are pure and holy, its precepts juſt and righteous; its worſhip is a reaſonable ſervice, refined from the errors of idolatry and ſuperſtition, and ſpiritual like the God who is the object of it: it offers the aid and aſſiſtance of heaven to the weakneſs of nature; which makes the religion of the Goſpel to be as practicable as it is reaſonable: it promiſes infinite rewards to obedience, and threatens eternal puniſhment to obſtinate offenders; which makes it of the utmoſt conſequence to us ſoberly to conſider it, ſince every one who rejects it ſtakes his own ſoul againſt the truth of it.

Are theſe ſuch pretences as are to be turned off with general and looſe objections? Becauſe miracles may be pretended, ſhall not the miracles of Chriſt be conſidered, which were not ſo much as queſtioned by the adverſaries of the Goſpel in the firſt ages? Becauſe there may be impoſtors, ſhall Chriſt be rejected, whoſe life was innocence, and free from any ſuſpicion of private deſign, and who died to ſeal the truths he had delivered? Becauſe there have been cheats introduced by worldly men, endeavouring to make a gain of godlineſs, ſhall the Goſpel be ſuſpected, that in every page declares

againſt the world, againſt the pleaſures, the riches, the glories of it; that labours no one thing more than to draw off the affections from things below, and to raiſe them to the enjoyment of heavenly and ſpiritual delights?

But, whether you will conſider it, or no; yet there is ſuch a call to you to conſider it, as muſt render your neglect inexcuſable. You cannot ſay you want inducement to conſider it, when you ſee it entertained by men of all degrees. The Goſpel does not make ſo mean a figure in the world as to juſtify your contempt of it: the light ſhines forth in the world, whether you will receive it, or no; if you receive it not, the conſequence is upon your own ſoul, and you muſt anſwer it.

Were men ſincere in their profeſſions of religion, or even in their deſires of ſalvation and immortality, the controverſies in religion would ſoon take a new turn: the only queſtion would be, whether the Goſpel were true, or no. We ſhould have no reaſoning againſt revelation in general; for it is impoſſible that a ſincerely religious man ſhould not wiſh for a revelation of God's will, if there be not one already: we ſhould then ſee another kind of induſtry uſed in ſearching the truths of God, which are now overlooked, becauſe men have loſt their regard for the things which make for their ſalvation. Were the Goſpel but a title to an eſtate, there is not an infidel of them all who would ſit down contented with his own general reaſonings againſt it: it would then be thought worth looking into; its proofs would be conſidered, and a juſt weight allowed them: and yet the Goſpel is our

title, our only title, to a much nobler inheritance than this world knows; it is the patent by which we claim life and immortality, and all the joys and bleſſings of the heavenly Canaan. Had any man but a pedigree as ancient as the Goſpel, what a noiſe ſhould we have about it! and yet the Goſpel is deſpiſed, which ſets forth to us a nobler pedigree than the kings of the earth can boaſt; a deſcent from Chriſt, who is head over the whole family; by which we claim as heirs of God, and coheirs with Chriſt: and, did we not deſpiſe our relation with Chriſt, and ſecretly abhor and dread the thoughts of immortality, we could not be ſo cold in our regard to the Goſpel of God.

I wiſh every man, who argues againſt the Chriſtian religion, would take this one ſerious thought along with him; that he muſt one day, if he believes that God will judge the world, argue the caſe once more at the judgment-ſeat of God: and let him try his reaſons accordingly. Do you reject the Goſpel becauſe you will admit nothing that pretends to be a revelation? Conſider well; is it a reaſon that you will juſtify to the face of God? Will you tell him, that you had reſolved to receive no poſitive commands from him, nor to admit any of his declarations for law? If it will not be a good reaſon then, it is not a good reaſon now; and the ſtouteſt heart will tremble to give ſuch an impious reaſon to the Almighty, which is a plain defiance to his wiſdom and authority.

DISCOURSE I.

PART III.

A FAIRER iſſue there cannot be for the trial of any religion: for, ſince eternal life is the end that all men aim at by religion, that muſt neceſſarily be the beſt religion, which moſt certainly leads us to this great and deſirable bleſſing. But the difficulty is, how to apply this rule, ſo as to form our judgments upon it, and direct our choice, ſince all religions pretend *to have the words of eternal life*; which makes it neceſſary for us firſt to enable ourſelves to determine which are, and which are not, *words of eternal life*, before this rule can be of any ſervice to us in diſtinguiſhing true and genuine religion from the ſpecious pretences of counterfeits and impoſtors. In order to this, we muſt conſider, that there are ſome principles which in all religions are allowed, and from the conſideration of which we may poſſibly come to ſome fixed determination in this matter: ſuch are theſe; that life eternal can be had only from God, who is the author and fountain of all being: that from him the only way to obtain it, is, by living and converſing in this world agreeably to his holy will: from

whence it evidently follows, that, ſince to do the will of God is the only way of obtaining eternal life, the words which inſtruct us in the knowledge of God's will, muſt needs be *the words of eternal life*. Thus far we can go upon mere principles of reaſon.

From hence the way lies open and plain to another conſequence of ſome importance in the preſent queſtion: for, ſince it is the perfection of religion, conſidered as a rule or inſtitution, to direct us in all things to act according to the will of God, when we inquire from what principle we ought to derive our religion, we do in truth inquire from what principle we may beſt derive the knowledge of God's will; for the knowledge of God's will is univerſally acknowledged to be the true and proper rule and meaſure of our religious obedience in all things.

There are but two ways by which we can poſſibly arrive at this knowledge: one is, by following the dictates of reaſon and nature; when from that knowledge of God and his attributes, which reaſon and nature furniſh us with, we infer his right of governing, and our duty of obeying; and when from the holineſs and purity of God, and the neceſſary difference between good and evil, we infer wherein our obedience muſt conſiſt, namely, in ſerving an holy God in holy things, and in keeping ourſelves pure and undefiled from evil, even as he is pure: and this is called natural religion. The other way by which we may poſſibly arrive at the knowledge of God's will, is, by having it declared to us, either immediately by God himſelf, or by others ſufficiently authorized and commiſſioned by him to make

ſuch declaration in his name: and this is what we call revelation. And, as nature and revelation are the only ways by which we can come to the underſtanding of God's will; ſo, for that reaſon, they are the only principles from which religion can derive itſelf.

Between theſe two, conſidered purely as principles of religious knowledge, it is no hard matter to judge which is the ſafeſt and ſecureſt for us to rely on; it being a matter that will bear no diſpute, whether our own reaſon or God himſelf can beſt inſtruct us in the knowledge of his will; upon which ſingle point the whole controverſy between nature and revelation turns, as long as they are conſidered only as principles of religion, without drawing into the queſtion the merits of any particular revelation, or of any particular ſcheme or ſyſtem of natural religion: the conſequence of which is plainly this; that, as nature is a better guide than any pretended revelation, ſo every true revelation, as far as it goes, is a better guide than nature.

The laſt conſequence, and for the ſake of which I have made this deduction hitherto, is, that, when any particular revelation is to be examined, when it lies before us to be received or to be rejected, it is abſurd, in the very nature of the thing, to put the determination upon a compariſon between natural religion and revelation, conſidered in themſelves; ſince, if the revelation be falſe, there want no arguments to make it yield to nature; and, if it be true, no arguments can be ſufficient.

And thus it appears, that the very topic itſelf is

excluded, from which the Deiſts of the preſent age fetch their main ſupport, and all the plauſible arguments by which they labour to explode the Goſpel, and to render it uſeleſs and inſignificant, and conſequently vile and contemptible in the opinion of the world.

Upon the ſame principle we may proceed to examine other general objections made uſe of in oppoſition to the revelation of Chriſt Jeſus. The Goſpel is a diſpenſation of providence in regard to mankind, which the reaſon of man cannot fathom, nor his utmoſt ſagacity ſearch into; which the Angels themſelves *deſire to look into*, and, after all their inquiries, are content to reverence and adore at an awful diſtance. Theſe methods of ſalvation are matter of great complaint with unbelievers: they think it highly unreaſonable, that God ſhould propoſe ſuch things as objects of faith; and from the unreaſonableneſs of the impoſition they argue, which preſuppoſed, they conclude not much amiſs,) that theſe terms of ſalvation were not of God's contrivance, but are owing to the guile and deceit of cunning impoſtors, who took pleaſure in abuſing mankind.

Though this objection is levelled againſt the Chriſtian revelation particularly; yet it muſt conclude equally againſt revelation in general, conſidered as a principle of religion, if it makes any addition to the things to be done or believed beyond what reaſon teaches us. The queſtion then will be, whether it can be reaſonable for God to propoſe any articles of faith, or any conditions of ſalvation, the reaſon and propriety of which does not appear to

man? And this is a queſtion of great importance, it being confeſſedly the caſe of the Goſpel.

In the ſenſe of the Goſpel, whatever is the effect of God's ſecret counſels, in order to the redemption of the world, is a myſtery. That men ought to obey God in truth and holineſs, that they may obtain his bleſſing—that ſinners ought to be puniſhed—are not, nor ever were, myſteries; becauſe theſe things were ſufficiently publiſhed to the world, when men were endued with reaſon. But all the methods of religion beyond theſe were, and ſtill are, myſterious: the intention of God to redeem the world from ſin by ſending his own Son in the likeneſs of man, is a myſtery unknown to former ages; it is a myſtery ſtill, inaſmuch as we cannot penetrate into the depths of this divine economy, or account by the principles of human reaſon for every ſtep or article of it. But let it be remembered, that not human reaſon, but the will of God, is the rule and meaſure of religious obedience; and, if ſo, the terms of religious obedience muſt be tried by their agreeableneſs to the will of God, and not meaſured by the narrow compaſs of man's reaſon. If reaſon can diſcover, either by internal or external ſigns, the conditions of ſalvation propoſed to us to be the will of God, the work of reaſon is over, and we are obliged to uſe the means, which are preſcribed by God, as we hope to obtain the end, which is the gift of God: and, how little ſoever reaſon can penetrate into the myſteries of God; yet, if it can diſcover them to be indeed the myſteries of God, and by him propoſed to us as neceſſary to ſalvation, it diſcovers plainly to us, that theſe myſte-

ries of God are *the words of eternal life*; which is all, I think, that a reaſonable man would deſire to find in his religion: for, ſince all that he deſires to obtain by his religion is eternal life, what more has he to look for in his religion, than *the words*, or means, *of eternal life?*

This is true, you will ſay, upon ſuppoſition of God's requiring the belief of myſteries, or the practice of any poſitive duties from us; then it will be our duty to hearken to his voice, and entirely ſubmit our wills and underſtandings to him: but how does this prove it reaſonable for him ſo to do, or remove the prejudice that lies againſt the Goſpel, becauſe of its myſterious doctrines?

To come then to the point: it will, I ſuppoſe, be eaſily granted to be agreeable to the wiſdom and goodneſs of God to reveal whatever is neceſſary to be revealed in order to perfect the ſalvation of mankind; as, on the other ſide, it muſt be allowed, that it is not conſiſtent with infinite wiſdom and goodneſs to reveal myſteries merely to puzzle the minds of men. Theſe allowances being made on each ſide, the queſtion is reduced to this; whether it can be ever neceſſary to reveal myſteries in order to perfect the ſalvation of mankind? Whenever it is neceſſary, it muſt be reaſonable, unleſs it be unreaſonable for God to ſave the world; and upon this foot it will be found, that a revelation cannot have *the words of eternal life*, without opening to us all neceſſary truths, how abſtruſe and myſterious ſoever ſome of them may be.

With reſpect to infinite wiſdom, there is no ſuch thing as myſtery in nature: all things are equally

clear in the underſtanding o fthe Deity; all things lie naked before his eye, having no darkneſs, obſcurity, or difficulty in them. A myſtery therefore is no real or poſitive thing in nature; nor is it any thing that is inherent or belonging to the ſubjects of which it is predicated. When we ſay this thing or that thing is a myſtery, according to the form of our ſpeech, we ſeem to affirm ſomething of this or that thing; but, in truth, the propoſition is not affirmative with reſpect to the thing, but negative with reſpect to ourſelves: for, when we ſay this thing is a myſtery, of the thing we ſay nothing, but of ourſelves we ſay, that we do not comprehend this thing. With reſpect to our underſtanding, there is no more difference between truth that is, and truth that is not myſterious, than, with reſpect to our ſtrength, there is between a weight which we can lift, and a weight which we cannot lift: for, as defect of ſtrength in us makes ſome weights to be unmoveable, ſo likewiſe defect of underſtanding makes ſome truths to be myſterious.

The complaint then againſt myſteries in religion amounts to no more than this; that God has done ſomething for us, or appointed ſomething for us to do, in order to ſave us, the reaſon of which we do not underſtand; and requires us to believe and to comply with theſe things, and to truſt him that we ſhall receive the benefit of them: for this is all the faith, or poſitive obedience, that is required of us; as will in its due place appear.

But to return to the queſtion, whether it can be ever neceſſary for God to reveal myſteries, or appoint poſitive duties, in order to perfect the ſalva-

tion of mankind; or, in other words, to uſe ſuch means for the ſalvation of the world, the agreeableneſs of which to the end intended the reaſon of man cannot diſcover? This is certain, that, whenever it is out of our power by natural means to ſave ourſelves, if we are to be ſaved at all, it is neceſſary that ſupernatural means be made uſe of: and, how hard ſoever it may be to conceive this to be the caſe of mankind in general; yet of particular men it will not, I preſume, be denied, but that they may ſin ſo far, and render themſelves ſo obnoxious to the juſtice of God, that it ſhall not be in the power of mere reaſon and nature to find an infallible method of atoning the juſtice of God, and, conſequently, redeeming the ſinner from death: and in this caſe there is a plain neceſſity that the ſinner muſt periſh, or be redeemed by ſuch means as reaſon and nature are ſtrangers to; ſince, in the means that reaſon and nature can preſcribe, there is confeſſedly no help for him.

What may confeſſedly happen to one man, or to many, may poſſibly happen to all: ſuppoſe then (ſince there is no abſurdity in the ſuppoſition) that all men have ſo far ſinned, as to have loſt the rights and pleas of obedient ſubjects; that an univerſal corruption has ſpread through the whole race, and rendered them incapable of performing the duties of reaſon and nature, or, if they could perform them, precluded the merit and title of all ſuch works to reward; for the works of nature, though they may prevent a forfeiture, yet they cannot reverſe a forfeiture once incurred: in this caſe what ſhall be done? Is it unreaſonable for God to redeem the

world? God forbid! and yet by the means of reaſon and nature the world cannot be redeemed. Will you allow that God may freely forgive the ſins of the world, and remit the puniſhment, and beſtow even on ſinners the gift of eternal life? How myſterious would even this grace be, and how far beyond the power of reaſon to comprehend! Could you, from any of the natural notions of your mind, reconcile this method of redemption with the wiſdom, juſtice, and holineſs of God? Conſider the eſſential difference between good and evil, the natural beauty of one, and the natural deformity of the other; compare them with the eſſential holineſs of the Deity; and then tell me the ground upon which he reconciles himſelf to ſin, pities and forgives it, and decrees immortal glory for the ſinner: or, if this way pleaſe you not, conſider his wiſdom, by which he rules and governs the world, and try, by all the notions you can frame of wiſdom, whether it be not neceſſary for the good government of the rational world, that rewards and puniſhments ſhould be divided with an equal hand to virtue and vice; and then tell me, where is the wiſdom of dropping all the puniſhment due to ſin, and receiving ſinners not only to pardon, but to glory? There may be wiſdom and holineſs in this, but not human wiſdom, nor holineſs that human reaſon can diſcern; but infinite myſterious wiſdom and holineſs. If from the notions of wiſdom and holineſs you can have no help in this caſe, much leſs will the natural notion of juſtice aſſiſt you. Is not juſtice converſant in rewards and puniſhments? Is it not the eſſence of juſtice to diſtri-

bute both where they are due? Is there not in nature and reaſon a connection between virtue and reward, between vice and puniſhment? How then comes nature to be reverſed, and the laws of reaſon to be diſturbed? and how, as if juſtice were more than poetically blind, come ſinners to be entitled to life and happineſs? Even in this caſe therefore, of God's finally forgiving the ſins of the world, which is the loweſt that can be put, religion would neceſſarily be myſterious, and not to be apprehended by reaſon or nature, but to be received by faith; and our only refuge would be, not in the reaſon and nature of the thing, but in the unfathomable goodneſs and incomprehenſible mercy of God.

But, ſhould it really be, as to human reaſon it appears, inconſiſtent with the wiſdom and juſtice of God, ſo freely to pardon ſin, as not to leave the marks of his diſpleaſure upon it, or to remit the tranſgreſſions of men, without vindicating in the face of the whole creation the honour of his laws and government; in what a maze muſt reaſon then be loſt in ſearching after the means of reconcilement and redemption! How ſhall ſin be puniſhed, and yet the ſinner ſaved? How ſhall the honour of God's government be vindicated in the face of all the world, and yet in the face of all the world the rebels juſtified and exalted? Theſe are difficulties irreconcileable to human reaſon and nature; and yet they muſt be reconciled, or the world, once loſt, muſt lie for ever under condemnation. The religion that can adjuſt this difficulty, and give us the clue to lead us through theſe mazes, in which human reaſon muſt for ever wander, can only have

the words of eternal life; which *words of eternal life* muſt neceſſarily abound with inconceivable myſteries, but with myſteries of grace and mercy.

So far is it from being an objection againſt the Goſpel of Chriſt, that it contains many wonderful myſteries of the hidden wiſdom of God, that, as our caſe ſtands, without a myſtery it is impoſſible for us to be ſaved: for, ſince reaſon and nature cannot find the means of reſcuing ſinners from puniſhment, and of making atonement to the juſtice of God; ſince they cannot preſcribe a proper ſatisfaction for ſin, in which the honour of God and the ſalvation of men ſhall be at once conſulted; ſince they cannot remedy the corruption that has ſpread through the race of mankind, or infuſe new principles of virtue and holineſs into the ſouls already ſubdued to the luſt and power of ſin; ſince, if they could procure our pardon for what is paſt, they cannot ſecure us for the future from the ſame temptations, which by fatal experience we know we cannot withſtand: ſince, I ſay, theſe things cannot be done by the means of reaſon and nature, they muſt be done by ſuch means as reaſon and nature know nothing of; that is, in other words, they muſt be done by myſterious means, of the propriety of which we can have no adequate notion or conception.

If you ſtand in need of no new favour, if you aim not ſo high as eternal life, religion without myſteries may well ſerve your turn. The principles of natural religion tend to procure the peace and tranquillity of this life; and the not diſtinguiſhing between religion as a rule of life for our preſent uſe

and well-being here, and as the means of obtaining pardon for ſin and eternal life hereafter, may have in ſome meaſure occaſioned the great complaint againſt the myſteries of the Goſpel: for myſteries are not indeed the neceſſary parts of religion, conſidered only as a rule of action; but moſt neceſſary they are to it, when conſidered as a means of obtaining pardon and eternal glory. And this farther ſhews, how unreaſonably men object againſt the myſterious wiſdom of the Goſpel, ſince all that the Goſpel preſcribes to us as our duty is plain and evident; all that is myſterious is on God's part, and relates entirely to the ſurpriſing acts of divine wiſdom and mercy in the redemption of the world. Conſider the Goſpel then as a rule of action, no religion was ever ſo plain, ſo calculated upon the principles of reaſon and nature; ſo that natural religion itſelf had never more natural religion in it. If we conſider the end propoſed to us, and the means uſed to entitle us to the benefit of it, it grows myſterious, and ſoars above the reach of human reaſon; for God has done more for us than reaſon could teach us to expect, or can now teach us to comprehend. Let us then do our part, which we plainly underſtand, and let us truſt in God that he will do his; though it exceeds the ſtrength of human wiſdom to comprehend the length and depth and breadth of that wiſdom and mercy, which God has manifeſted to the world through his Son Chriſt Jeſus, our Lord.

DISCOURSE I.

PART IV.

As, with reſpect to the health of the body, there is one regimen proper to preſerve and maintain a ſound conſtitution, and another to aſſiſt and reſtore a broken and diſtempered one; the one caſe requiring little more than wholeſome food and temperance, the other calling for all that the help and ſkill of the phyſician can furniſh: ſo it is in religion. An innocent man has nothing more to do than to preſerve his innocence, which is his title to the favour of God; and therefore his religion is only a rule of life, directing him in all things how to preſerve his integrity, and walk uprightly with his God. This is the firſt and the natural notion of religion; becauſe the firſt and natural ſtate of mankind was a ſtate of innocence, and required no other religion than this. Here indeed there is no room for any thing myſterious, this religion being founded merely in the natural notions of juſtice and equity, and the neceſſary difference between good and evil: nor is it at all to be wondered at, that, whilſt men conſider religion under this ſingle view, and imagine that whatever is to be done for their ſalvation is to be done by themſelves, and that religion is only the

rule directing them how to do it, they ſhould ſee no uſe of myſteries, nor, conſequently, any reaſon to admit them.

But, upon ſuppoſition of men's becoming ſinners, and liable to the diſpleaſure and wrath of God, religion itſelf becomes a new thing. Innocence, which once was all the care religion had, is now vaniſhed, and with it all our hopes of glory and immortality. The natural attributes of God, which to the eyes of innocence afforded a pleaſant proſpect, to the eyes of ſinners are exceeding dreadful. What then ſhall the ſinner do? Shall he ſeek to natural religion in this diſtreſs? But, if this religion be nothing but a rule of living well, what is that to him, who has already lived ſo ill as to be obnoxious to condemnation? As well may you ſend the condemned malefactor to ſtudy the law by which he dies, in order to ſave his life, as the ſinner to the perfect rule of life, which he has tranſgreſſed, in order to ſave his ſoul. The more he ſtudies the rule by which he ſhould have lived, and compares it with his own tranſgreſſions, he will but the more fully comprehend how much he deſerves puniſhment, and how deſperate the ſtate is to which his ſin has reduced him. In a religion, which is barely a rule of life, there is no ſure comfort or ſupport to be had againſt the terrors of guilt and ſin.

Unbelievers may think we aſk too much of them to be granted, when we argue upon this ſuppoſition, *that all are ſinners, and are fallen ſhort of the glory of God.* But, as this is the ſuppoſition upon which the Goſpel uniformly proceeds, pretending to no more than to provide means of ſalvation for ſinners, who-

ever takes upon himſelf to queſtion the reaſonableneſs of the Goſpel, muſt conſider it as being what it pretends to be; otherwiſe he will not argue againſt the Goſpel, but againſt ſomething elſe formed in his own imagination. If, upon examination of the Goſpel, it appears to be indeed, what it pretends to be, a means for ſaving ſinners, you muſt neceſſarily come to one or other of the following reſolutions: if you are conſcious to yourſelf that you are a ſinner, you muſt gladly receive the remedy provided for you, and which upon examination you find to be proper for your caſe; or, if you are ſatisfied with yourſelf, and want no help, you muſt reject it as unneceſſary and improper in your caſe, and truſt entirely to your own merit; and muſt appear before God, and demand life and immortality as due from his juſtice and equity, which you will not accept as a gift from his grace and mercy.

Let us then conſider what is neceſſary to be done for a ſinner, in order to reſtore him to eternal life; and that will teach us the true notion of that religion mentioned in the text, and which are *the words of eternal life*; and will enable us to judge what weight there is in the objection raiſed againſt ſuch a religion from the additions which it makes to natural religion.

Firſt then, it is neceſſary, in order to reſtore a ſinner to eternal life, that God be reconciled to him:

Secondly, that the ſinner be purged from the impurity contracted by ſin:

Thirdly, that for the future he be enabled to obey the holy laws of God, without which his reconcile-

ment to God would be fruitleſs and of no effect.

I think there needs but little to be ſaid to prove the neceſſity of theſe conditions: if the ſinner's caſe be deſperate, becauſe God is provoked by his iniquity, and juſtly angry at his offences; there can be no foundation for him to hope, till God be reconciled to him: if ſinners are impure and odious in the ſight of God, becauſe of their ſins; their impurity muſt be cleanſed, before he can again take pleaſure in them, and delight to do them good: if the tranſgreſſion of the laws of reaſon and nature, which are the laws of God, was that which loſt him the favour of God; that he may not loſe it again, after being reconciled to him, it is neceſſary that he ſin no more, or, if he does, that a remedy be provided to reſtore him.

Allowing then theſe conditions to be neceſſary to the ſalvation of a ſinner, and likewiſe that religion muſt contain *the words*, or means, *of eternal life*; it neceſſarily follows, that the ſinner's religion muſt contain the means by which he may be reconciled to God; the means by which he may be purified and cleanſed from ſin; and the means by which he may be enabled for the future to obey the will of God: for theſe are the neceſſary means by which a ſinner muſt be ſaved; and therefore they muſt neceſſarily be contained in the ſinner's religion. How imperfect a notion then have we of ſuch a religion, when we conſider it only as a rule of action! and how weakly muſt we argue againſt it, when our arguments are pointed only againſt this notion or idea of it!

A rule of action muſt be plain and intelligible, or elſe it is no rule; for we can neither obey nor diſobey a law that we cannot underſtand: and therefore from this idea of religion, that it is a rule of action, there lies a very plain objection againſt admitting myſteries in religion: and let the objection have its full force, the Goſpel is ſecure from the blow; for the rule of life contained in the Goſpel is the plaineſt, as well as the pureſt, that ever the world was acquainted with. In the precepts of Chriſtianity there is no myſtery, no ſhadow of a myſtery, to be ſeen; they are all ſimple, and to men of the loweſt underſtandings intelligible; the duties which it requires us to perform to God, to ourſelves, and to our neighbours, are ſuch as, when offered to us, we cannot but in our minds and conſciences approve: and therefore the Goſpel, as far as it is a rule of life, is far from being myſterious, ſince both the ſenſe and the reaſon of the law are open and plain, and ſuch as we cannot but ſee, and, when we ſee, conſent to.

But, ſince this is not the only notion or idea of religion, that it is a rule of life; let us conſider whether, according to the other ideas which belong to it, it be equally abſurd to ſuppoſe it in ſome points myſterious. Let us examine it then under this notion, as containing the means by which God is reconciled to ſinners.

And firſt, it is obvious to obſerve, that here is not the ſame reaſon againſt myſteries as in the other caſe: for, though we cannot practiſe a law without underſtanding it, yet God may be reconciled to us, and we have the aſſurance of it, without our being

able to comprehend and account for every thing that was done in order to it. A malefactor may receive a pardon, and enjoy the benefit of it, without knowing what it was that induced his prince to grant it; and would, without doubt, be thought mad to ſtand out againſt the mercy, merely becauſe he could not dive into the ſecret reaſons of it. Could not a ſinner receive the benefit of God's mercy without underſtanding all the methods of it, it would then be neceſſary indeed, that even this part of religion ſhould be free from myſteries, and made plain to every man's underſtanding: but, ſince a ſinner may be ſaved by a mercy which he cannot comprehend, where is the abſurdity of offering ſinners mercy, and requiring them to rely on it, or, in other words, to believe in it, though it be never ſo incomprehenſible or myſterious? Were it unreaſonable or impoſſible to believe things to be, without knowing how they came to be, faith could never be reaſonable in religion, or in any thing elſe: but, ſince the knowledge of the eſſence of things, and of the exiſtence of things, are two diſtinct kinds of knowledge, and independent of one another; our ignorance of the eſſence of things, and of the relation they have to each other, can never be a good argument againſt the belief of their exiſtence: and yet this objection contains all the arguments that unbelievers bring againſt the myſteries of Chriſtianity. Why do they, for inſtance, refuſe to believe Chriſt to be the Son of God? only becauſe they cannot comprehend how he can be the eternal Son of God: and, if they will be true to their principle, and carry the objection

as far as it will go, they muſt in time come to deny the exiſtence of every thing in the world, themſelves not excepted. Since then to comprehend the reaſon and nature of things, is neither neceſſary to our believing the reality of them, nor yet to our receiving benefit and advantage from them; how comes it to be neceſſary, that in religion there ſhould be nothing that we do not underſtand? Neceſſary it cannot be to our ſalvation, for we may be ſaved by means we comprehend not; nor yet to our faith is it neceſſary, for we may, and do daily believe the reality of things without knowing any thing of the nature and reaſons of them. And, if myſteries may ſet forward our ſalvation, and are not deſtructive of our faith, upon what other views they can be excluded from religion, I cannot conceive.

Thus much then may ſerve to ſhew, that according to this notion of religion, that it contains the means by which God is reconciled to ſinners, no argument can be drawn to weaken the authority of any religion, becauſe ſome parts of it are myſterious: but, if you conſider it farther, it will appear, that this part of religion muſt neceſſarily be myſterious, and the means of reconcilement ſuch as reaſon and nature cannot comprehend. This I partly obſerved to you in a former part of this diſcourſe, and ſhall therefore the more briefly touch it now.

The principles, from which this conſequence I think will follow, are theſe: that men are ſinners: that God muſt be reconciled to ſinners in order to their ſalvation: that religion muſt contain *the words of eternal life*, or the certain method by which we may obtain eternal life. The conſequence of theſe

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of reconcilement: lay down firſt theſe cer-
d allowed principles; that it is juſt for God
iſh ſinners—that God can do nothing but

what is juſt: and try how you can come at the other concluſion, which muſt be the foundation of a ſinner's reconcilement to God; namely, that it is juſt for God not to puniſh ſinners, and righteous in him to receive them to favour. If reaſon cannot diſcover nor comprehend how both theſe propoſitions ſhould be true at the ſame time with reſpect to the ſame perſons, it is impoſſible that it ſhould diſcover or comprehend the means which God makes uſe of to reconcile himſelf to ſinners; that is, it is impoſſible for God to make uſe of any means that are not myſterious, that is, above the reach and comprehenſion of human wiſdom.

This difficulty muſt for ever remain, as long as we attempt to ſcan the divine juſtice by our narrow conceptions of it: and this is the very difficulty that makes many things in the Goſpel to be myſterious. The Scripture tells us, *that God has been reconciled to ſinners by the death of Chriſt—that he made atonement for the ſins of the whole world.* Theſe are great myſteries: we cannot ſee that there is any proportion between the ſufferings of one and the ſins of all; or, if there were, we cannot ſee the juſtice of laying the ſins of the wicked upon the innocent head. If we could ſee the reaſons upon which the juſtice of God proceeds in this caſe, here would be no myſtery: and therefore the myſterioufneſs of the whole proceeding ariſes only from hence, that our finite minds cannot comprehend the reaſons and limits of the divine juſtice. Moſt certain it is, that, if God be reconciled to ſinners, ſatisfaction muſt be made to his juſtice; for he may as well ceaſe to be God, as to be juſt. Whatever ſatisfaction is

made, it muſt be founded in the reaſons of his own juſtice, that is, of juſtice directed by infinite wiſdom. The reaſons of ſuch juſtice we cannot comprehend; and therefore we muſt either be ſaved by means that are myſterious to us, or God muſt give us infinite wiſdom to comprehend the reaſon of his juſtice. You ſee then, that from this notion of religion, conſidered as containing the means by which God reconciled himſelf to the world, it is ſo far from being abſurd to ſuppoſe it in ſome parts myſterious, that it is not poſſible it ſhould be otherwiſe.

To redeem the world is the work of God: he only could find the means of reconciliation, and he only could apply them: it is our part merely to accept them, and to obey the terms and conditions upon which he offers them. Religion therefore, which is founded upon redemption, muſt needs conſiſt of theſe two parts; an account of the redemption wrought by God, and inſtructions to men upon what terms they may reap the benefit of the redemption. As far as our part goes in the Goſpel, there is nothing myſterious; we have nothing to do for ourſelves, but what we very well know how to do. As to the other parts of the Goſpel, we are not required to comprehend and account for God's methods of ſalvation, but only to accept them; which, as I before obſerved, are two diſtinct acts of the mind, and not dependent upon each other. As for the work of God in our redemption, it is indeed wonderful and myſterious: and why ſhould it ſeem ſtrange to you, that it is ſo? Are there any other works of God which are not

myſterious? Conſider the creation and formation of this world; conſider the ſun, the moon, and the ſtars, the works of his hand; tell me by what ſecret power they move, by what rule their different motions were at firſt impreſſed, and by what ſecret in nature or providence ever ſince preſerved. Or, if you think it hard to be ſent to conſider the heavens at a diſtance, do but conſider the earth, and the meaneſt creatures of it: can you tell how they are formed? how they *live, and move, and have their being?* Nay, can you name that work of God, which is not myſterious? Is there any thing in nature, the firſt principles of which you can diſcover and ſee into? If in all the works of God there is no ſuch thing, why ſhould we think it ſtrange, that in his work of redemption he has appeared ſo like himſelf, and that in this, as in every thing elſe, *his ways are paſt finding out?* We live by the preſervation of providence, and enjoy the comforts and pleaſures of this life; and yet how myſterious is our preſervation! how little do we know of the methods by which we are preſerved! and yet the benefits of it we enjoy, notwithſtanding our ignorance of the means: and why is it a greater abſurdity to ſuppoſe that men may be redeemed, without comprehending all the means made uſe of in their redemption? In all other inſtances whatever, the miraculouſneſs of an eſcape adds to the pleaſure and joy of it, and is always remembered with a kind of ecſtaſy in the relation. Salvation is the only inſtance in which men demur upon the means, and are unwilling to receive the mercy, becauſe they cannot underſtand the methods of obtaining it. In any other

caſe a man would be thought beſide himſelf, who ſhould act in the ſame manner.

As to the two other points, the cleanſing ſinners from their iniquity, and enabling them to live virtuouſly for the future; or, in other words, the ſanctification and grace promiſed in the Goſpel; I ſhall not enter into the conſideration of them particularly, becauſe the ſame way of reaſoning is applicable in theſe caſes, *mutatis mutandis*; and therefore I ſhall leave them to your own reflection.

Upon the whole; the only true and fair way of judging of the Goſpel is, to conſider what is the true ſtate of mankind in the world. If men are in a ſtate of purity and innocence, no redemption is wanting, and the methods preſcribed in the Goſpel bear no relation to their circumſtances: but, if men have every where ſinned, and come ſhort of the glory of God, the law of nature cannot help them to thoſe bleſſings, which by the law of nature are forfeited; and there is manifeſtly a neceſſity to have recourſe to other means to obtain ſalvation.

It may be ſaid, for it often is ſaid, that, whatever degree of light men have, it will make little difference in the caſe; ſince an equitable judge will conſider men and their merits in proportion to their abilities. Allowing this maxim to be true, yet it plainly goes no farther than this; that God will not puniſh men for not doing the things which their natural powers enabled them not to do. The argument cannot go farther: you cannot argue from the weakneſs or ſtupidity of men, that they ſhall be rewarded. It may be a good reaſon not to beat a man when he does amiſs, becauſe he is a

fool, and knows not what he does; but it is no reaſon to honour or to advance him. And therefore a religion founded in this favourite principle cannot be ſaid *to have the words of eternal life*; for no plea, no claim for eternal life can poſſibly be raiſed out of it.

Conſidering therefore religion under the character given in the text, *that it has the words of eternal life*; we ſhall have reaſon to conclude with St. Peter, that our only hope is in God, and in him whom he hath ſent, our bleſſed Lord and Redeemer; and with him to ſay, *Lord, whither ſhall we go? thou, thou only, haſt the words of eternal life. And we believe and are ſure that thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God.*

DISCOURSE II.

HEBREWS vii. 25.

Wherefore he is able alſo to ſave them to the uttermoſt that come unto God by him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for them.

WHEN we conſider the great and wonderful work of our redemption, though we cannot account for every ſtep of it to our own reaſon and underſtanding, yet neither can we imagine it to be the effect of mere will and arbitrary appointment, and void of all foundation in the reaſon and propriety of things. All the works of God are works of wiſdom; and, as far as our capacities give us leave to judge, we diſcern evident marks of wiſdom in them all, and diſcover a fitneſs and propriety in every thing with reſpect to the end which it is intended to ſerve or promote. If this be ſo in every inſtance in which we are able to make any judgment, it is a great preſumption that it is, and muſt be, ſo in all other inſtances, which are too high and great to be viewed and meaſured by human underſtanding: and we have one poſitive argument that it is ſo, ariſing from the natural notion we have of God, and of his attributes of wiſdom and juſtice. It is impoſſible to ſuppoſe ſuch a being to do any thing by chance, or in com-

pliance to mere will and humour. No: every act of God is the act of infinite wiſdom, and is founded in the neceſſary reaſon and propriety of things: and it is as true of the works of grace, as it is of the works of nature, that *in wiſdom he has ordained them all.*

It is one thing not to be able to diſcern the reaſons of providence, and another to ſuppoſe there is no reaſon in them. The reaſons, that made it either neceſſary or proper for Chriſt to die for the ſins of mankind, may be removed out of our ſight: but to ſuppoſe that Chriſt really did die for the ſins of the world, and yet that there was no reaſon or propriety in his ſo doing, is to found revealed religion upon a principle deſtructive of natural religion; for no religion can ſubſiſt, with an opinion that God is a being capable of acting without reaſon.

The publication of the Goſpel has made an alteration in the ſcheme of religion, by revealing to us the Son of God, *whom God hath appointed heir of all things, by whom alſo he made the worlds; who is the brightneſs of his glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon; who upholdeth all things by the word of his power*, Heb. i. 2, 3.

The knowledge of the Son of God, of his power and dominion in the creating and upholding all things, became neceſſary, as the foundation of the faith required to be placed in him as our Redeemer. The character of Redeemer would be but ill ſupported by any perſon who had not power equal to the great undertaking. The New Teſtament doctrines therefore, relating to the dignity and authority of

Jeſus Chriſt, are relative to his office of Redeemer; and therefore there was no explicit declaration of them either before or under the law of Moſes.

Natural religion leads us by certain concluſions to the acknowledgment of one ſupreme intelligent Being, the author and creator of all things, and can by no reaſoning whatever diſcover any other being concerned in the making, framing, or governing the world: and therefore all the hopes and fears, in a word, all the religious acts of man, in the ſtate of natural religion, are neceſſarily and immediately relative to this one ſupreme Being. But put the caſe, that natural religion could poſſibly diſcover that this one ſupreme Being had an eternal Son, to whom he had communicated all power and authority, who was the immediate creator, governor, and judge of mankind; I beſeech you to conſider, whether, upon this ſuppoſition, there would not neceſſarily ariſe an alteration in natural religion; whether the hopes and fears, and all other religious acts of mankind, would not relate immediately to this their immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge. Can it be reaſonably ſuppoſed, that we were created by the Son of God, that we are now under his government, and ſhall be finally under his judgment; and at the ſame time maintained, that no ſervice, obedience, or regard is due to him from us his creatures and ſubjects? If this cannot be maintained conſiſtently with this ſuppoſition, the concluſion will be, that the religion of a Chriſtian is a natural and reaſonable ſervice, ariſing from the relation between Chriſt and mankind, which the Goſpel has revealed and made known to the world.

When we conſider what expectations we have from our Redeemer, and what great promiſes he has made to us in his Goſpel, we cannot poſſibly avoid inquiring who this perſon is: when we hear his promiſe to be always preſent with us to the end of the world, to ſupport us under all our difficulties, it is but a reaſonable demand to aſk by what authority he does theſe things: and when we are told that he liveth for ever, and is the Lord of life and of glory, there is no room to doubt of his being *able to ſave us.* St. Paul tells us, that the Lord Jeſus Chriſt *ſhall change our vile bodies, that they may be faſhioned like unto his glorious body.* A great expectation this! but conſider what the reaſonable foundation of this expectation is: St. Paul tells us, it is the energy of power with which Chriſt is endued, *whereby he is able even to ſubdue all things to himſelf.* Our Saviour puts this article upon the ſame foot: hear his declaration; *Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead ſhall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear ſhall live.* In the next verſe the reaſon follows; *For as the Father hath life in himſelf, ſo hath he given to the Son to have life in himſelf,* John v. 25, 26. If the Son has life in himſelf, even as the Father has life in himſelf; if he is really endued with power to which all nature ſubmits and obeys, a power ſufficient for the creation of the world at firſt, and for the preſervation ever ſince; we have reaſon to conclude, that he is now as able to reſtore life, as he was at firſt to give it; to call men from the grave into being, as well as to call them out of nothing at the firſt creation.

The relation of Chriſt to mankind as creator and governor conſidered, the work of redemption could not properly have been undertaken by any other hand: for, if Chriſt was the immediate creator and governor of the world, what reaſon can you imagine why God ſhould reſume this authority out of the hands of his Son, or ſet up another to have dominion and authority over any part of the creation, which by natural right belonged to him, who made all things? Were we to conſider one perſon as our Creator, and another as our Redeemer, it would be extremely to the diminution of the honour and regard due to the Creator, inaſmuch as the bleſſing of redemption would greatly outweigh the benefit of creation; and it would be natural to us to prefer the love that delivered us from the evils and miſeries of the world, to that which placed us in them. In the daily ſervice of our church we praiſe God for creating and preſerving us, but above all for his ineſtimable love in the redemption; which is very conſiſtent with reſpect to one great benefactor, who both made us and redeemed us: but, had any other hand redeemed us, ſuch expreſſion of gratitude to him would have reflected diſhonour upon the Creator.

St. Paul tells us expreſsly, that Chriſt is head of the church; a title founded in the right of redemption, *that in all things he might have the preeminence*; that, as he was the head of all creatures in virtue of having created them, ſo he might be the head of the church, the elect people of God, in virtue of having redeemed them: *for it pleaſed the Father, that in him ſhould all fulneſs dwell*; that is,

that Chriſt ſhould be all in all, the head of the ſecond as well as of the firſt creation; Coloſſ. i. 19. according to St. Paul's reaſoning here, if any other perſon had redeemed the world, or if the world had been redeemed without Chriſt, he would not *have had the preeminence in all things*; which yet he had before ſin came into the world; and, conſequently, the ſin of the world would have been the diminution of the headſhip and power of Chriſt. Upon theſe principles of the Goſpel revelation we may diſcern ſome propriety in Chriſt's coming to redeem the world: the work was ſuch, that no perſon of leſs power could undertake it; and his relation to the world was ſuch, as made it fit and proper to commit the work to him.

The redemption of mankind is a work which in the event ſeems to concern men only: but, conſidered as a vindication of the juſtice and goodneſs of God towards his creatures, it is a work expoſed to the conſideration of every intelligent being in the univerſe. Whether they may be ſuppoſed to inquire into God's dealings with the children of men, we may judge by ourſelves. It is little we know of the fall of angels; yet how has that employed human curioſity! for every man conſiders himſelf as having an intereſt in the juſtice and equity of that ſupreme Being, under whoſe government he lives, and by whoſe judgment he muſt finally ſtand or fall. If we doubt whether the ſuperior orders of beings have the like inclination, St. Peter will tell us, *that the ſufferings of Chriſt, and the glory that ſhould follow —are things the angels deſire to look into*, 1 Pet. i. 11, 12. And indeed the method of God's dealing

with any rational creature is a common concern to all; and it is for the honour of God's government to be vindicated in the ſight of every intelligent being, *that he may be juſtified in his ſaying, and overcome when he is judged.*

If this be ſo, it muſt neceſſarily follow, that the redemption by Chriſt, though it relates immediately to men, muſt be agreeable to all the reaſon and relation of things, known or diſcoverable by the higheſt intellectual beings; and need I add, that there are many ſuch not diſcoverable by us?

It is certain that we are but a ſmall part of the intellectual world: what relation we bear to the other parts, or to the whole, we know not; and yet undoubtedly the common Governor of the whole muſt in his dealings with every part have regard to this common relation, whether we underſtand it, or no. The author of the epiſtle to the Hebrews tells us, *that Chriſt took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the ſeed of Abraham.* Angels ſinned, and men ſinned: men only are redeemed. If God is juſt, there muſt be a reaſon for this, though not within our reach at preſent; and, when we come to know it, perhaps we may be no longer at a loſs to know that the ſacrifice of Chriſt was neceſſary to the ſalvation of men.

That there are many orders of beings ſuperior to man, is a propoſition ſo agreeable to reaſon, that there is little room to doubt of it. All theſe orders are in Scripture comprehended under the general name of *angel.* What relation theſe beings ſtand in to us in many reſpects, I will not now inquire: but that they are not unconcerned ſpectators in the

work of our redemption, is evident. Our Saviour tells us, *There is joy in the preſence of the angels of God over one ſinner that repenteth*, Luke xv. 10. Again; *He that overcometh, the ſame ſhall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confeſs his name before my Father, and before his angels*, Rev. iii. 5. Here the angels are mentioned as witneſſes of the juſtice of the judgment, and not merely as attendants to make up the pomp and ceremony of judicature.

Since then the juſtice and equity of God in redeeming men are things which the angels deſire and are concerned to look into; it is evident, that his juſtice and equity, and the reaſons of providence in this great affair, may be diſcernible to the higheſt order of intellectual beings, though not diſcoverable by us, the loweſt.

That this is probably the caſe, may be learnt from hence; that, where the Goſpel has revealed to us any of theſe relations, not diſcoverable by human reaſon, ſo far we can ſee the reaſon and propriety of this great work of our redemption.

But let us conſider how well theſe principles and doctrines of the Goſpel agree together, and how naturally the one flows from the other. When we view the ſad condition of mankind, the ſin, folly, and miſery, which are in the world; and then turn to contemplate the perfections, the wiſdom, and the goodneſs of him who made us; nature raiſes ſome hopes in us, that this confuſion will ſome day find a remedy, and ourſelves a releaſe, from the goodneſs and wiſdom of him who formed us. I blame not theſe hopes; they are juſt, they are natural.

But, if nature had the knowledge of the Son of God, and could diſcover that the world was made and is upheld by his power, that we are his immediate creatures and ſubjects; would it not be altogether as natural to found ſome hopes upon this relation? Should we not be willing to believe, that this great perſon, who made us, would have ſome compaſſion upon the work of his own hands? Should we not hope to find in him at leaſt an interceſſor on our behalf, an *advocate with the Father?* Should we not be inclined to recommend to him all our pleas, to put all our intereſt into his hands, truſting that he could not want bowels of affection towards the creatures whom he formed after his own image and likeneſs? I think, this would be but natural; and what more does the Goſpel require of us? It has diſcovered to us this relation between Chriſt and the world, between Chriſt and the church, and requires from us ſuch hope and faith, and ſuch obedience, as naturally flow from this relation; and could it poſſibly require leſs? Would it not be abſurd to tell us, that Chriſt is Lord of the world that is, and of that which is to come, and not to require us to have hope and confidence in him? Would it not be abſurd to tell us, that he is the Lord of life and glory, and to bid us expect life and glory through any other hands than his? Would it not be abſurd to tell us, that all judgment is committed to the Son, and yet no obedience due to him? or, that God has appointed him to be head over all, and yet no honour to be paid him?

From theſe and the like conſiderations we may

diſcern, how reaſonable, how natural the religion of the Goſpel is. It has indeed opened to us a new ſcene of things, diſcovering to us the ever-bleſſed Son of God, the creator and governor of the world: what elſe it propoſes to us reſults naturally from this relation between Chriſt and the world. The myſterious work of our redemption itſelf ſeems to have ariſen from the original relation between the only Son of God, and man the creature of God; and our chriſtian faith, in every article and branch of it, has a juſt foundation and ſupport in the power, authority, and preeminence of the Son of God. We may well believe he has redeemed us, ſince we know he made us. And, though all nature ſeems to frown on us, and to threaten death and deſtruction, from which no human power or cunning can deliver us; yet our hope is ſteadfaſt and unmoveable, being placed in him who is *able to ſubdue all things to himſelf.*

This belief, that the dead ſhall hear the voice of the Son of God, and ariſe to life, is the fundamental article of a Chriſtian's faith: if this be not well eſtabliſhed, our hope and confidence are vain, and the preaching the croſs of Chriſt is fooliſhneſs.

Let us reflect a little how our caſe ſtands with reſpect to the proſpect beyond the grave; let us conſider what hopes nature furniſhes, and how they are ſupported, confirmed, and enlarged, by the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus.

When we view the world in its preſent circumſtances, and ſee the miſery and oppreſſion that are in it; when we conſider that the diſtreſſes and ſor-

rows arifing from the weakneſs and the wickedneſs of men are in number and in weight ten times more than all the ſufferings to which we are expoſed by the mere frailty of our condition; we can hardly imagine that a wiſe and juſt God made the world to be what we find it is. When we look farther, and find that the beſt men oftentimes fare worſt; that even the deſire and endeavour to pleaſe God frequently expoſes them to infinite ſorrows in this world; we ſtand amazed, and are ready to doubt whether theſe appearances can be reconciled with the belief that God governs the world. But, ſince all nature proclaims the being and the power of God, and the viſible things of the creation declare in every language of the world the wiſdom and goodneſs of him who made them; under the force and conviction of this evidence that there is a God, we can find no poſſible way to account for his juſtice and goodneſs towards the children of men, but by ſuppoſing that *he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs:* and ſince this world evidently is not the ſcene of this judgment, we conclude there muſt be another, in which we ſhall ſtand before his tribunal. Thus far nature goes: all beyond this is vain philoſophy and imagination, founded in conceits which are in vogue to-day, and forgot to-morrow. Scholars may reaſon of the nature of the ſoul, and the condition of it when ſeparated from the body; but the common hopes of nature receive no ſupport from ſuch inquiries. But yet ſomething farther ſeems neceſſary to give eaſe to nature in this painful ſearch after life and happineſs. The numberleſs inſtances of

mortality which we hear and ſee, the remains of thoſe who left the world ages before we came into it, and are ſtill mouldering in their tombs, is undeniable evidence that death deſtroys this compound being which we call man. How to revive this union nature knows not; and as for thoſe who make the ſpirits of men in the divided ſtate to be perfect men, they ſeem to have got a concluſion without conſulting the premiſes.

Look now into the Goſpel: there you will find every reaſonable hope of nature, nay every reaſonable ſuſpicion of nature, cleared up and confirmed, every difficulty anſwered and removed. Do the preſent circumſtances of the world lead you to ſuſpect that God could never be author of ſuch corrupt and wretched creatures as men now are? Your ſuſpicions are juſt and well founded: God made man upright, but through the temptation of the devil ſin entered, and death and deſtruction followed after.

Do you ſuſpect, from the ſucceſs of virtue and vice in this world, that the providence of God does not interpoſe to protect the righteous from violence, or to puniſh the wicked? The ſuſpicion is not without ground. God leaves his beſt ſervants here to be tried oftentimes with affliction and ſorrow, and permits the wicked to flouriſh and abound. The call of the Goſpel is not to honour and riches here, but to take up our croſs and follow Chriſt.

Do you judge, from comparing the preſent ſtate of the world with the natural notion you have of God, and of his juſtice and goodneſs, that there muſt needs be another ſtate in which juſtice ſhall

take place? You reaſon right; and the Goſpel confirms the judgment. God has appointed a day to judge the world in righteouſneſs: then thoſe who mourn ſhall rejoice, thoſe who weep ſhall laugh, and the perſecuted and afflicted ſervants of God ſhall be heirs of his kingdom.

Have you ſometimes miſgivings of mind? Are you tempted to miſtruſt this judgment, when you ſee the difficulties which ſurround it on every ſide; ſome which affect the ſoul in its ſeparate ſtate, ſome which affect the body in its ſtate of corruption and diſſolution? Look to the Goſpel: there theſe difficulties are accounted for; and you need no longer puzzle yourſelf with dark queſtions concerning the ſtate, condition, and nature of ſeparate ſpirits, or concerning the body, however to appearance loſt and deſtroyed; for the body and ſoul ſhall once more meet to part no more, but to be happy for ever. In this caſe the learned cannot doubt, and the ignorant may be ſure, that it is the man, the very man himſelf, who ſhall riſe again: for an union of the ſame ſoul and body is as certainly the reſtoration of the man, as the dividing them was the deſtruction.

Would you know who it is that gives this aſſurance? It is one who is able to make good his word; one who loved you ſo well as to die for you; yet one too great to be held a priſoner in the grave. No; he roſe with triumph and glory, the firſt-born from the dead, and will in like manner call from the duſt of the earth all thoſe who put their truſt and confidence in him.

But who is this, you will ſay, who was ſubject to

death, and yet had power over death? How could ſo much weakneſs and ſo much ſtrength meet together? That God has the power of life, we know; but then he cannot die: that man is mortal, we know; but then he cannot give life.

Conſider; does this difficulty deſerve an anſwer, or does it not? Our bleſſed Saviour lived among us in a low and poor condition, expoſed to much ill treatment from his jealous countrymen: when he fell into their power, their rage knew no bounds: they reviled him, inſulted him, mocked him, ſcourged him, and at laſt nailed him to a croſs, where by a ſhameful and wretched death he finiſhed a life of ſorrow and affliction. Did we know no more of him than this, upon what ground could we pretend to hope that he will be able to ſave us from the power of death? We might ſay with the diſciples, *We truſted this had been he who ſhould have ſaved Iſrael*; but he is dead, he is gone, and all our hopes are buried in his grave.

If you think this ought to be anſwered, and that the faith of a Chriſtian cannot be a reaſonable faith, unleſs it be enabled to account for this ſeeming contradiction; I beſeech you then never more complain of the Goſpel for furniſhing an anſwer to this great objection, for removing this ſtumbling-block out of the way of our faith. He was a man, and therefore he died: he was the Son of God, and therefore he roſe from the dead, and will give life to all his true diſciples. He it was who formed this world and all things in it, and for the ſake of man was content to become man, and to taſte death for all, that all through him may live. This is a won-

ul piece of knowledge which God has revealed
s in his Goſpel; but he has not revealed it to
our wonder, but to confirm and eſtabliſh our
ı in him to whom he hath committed all power,
n he hath appointed heir of all things.
lad the Goſpel required of us to expect from
iſt the redemption of our ſouls and bodies, and
n us no reaſon to think that Chriſt was endued
ı power equal to the work, we might juſtly have
plained; and it would have been a ſtanding re-
ch, that Chriſtians believe they know not what.
to expect redemption from the Son of God,
reſurrection of our bodies from the ſame hand
ch at firſt created and formed them, are rational
well-founded acts of faith; and it is the Chriſ-
's glory, that he *knows in whom he has believed.*
'hat the world was made by the Son of God, is
ropoſition with which reaſon has no fault to
.: that he who made the world ſhould have
'er to renew it to life again, is highly conſonant
eaſon. All the myſtery lies in this, that ſo high
great a perſon ſhould condeſcend to become
ı, and ſubject to death, for the ſake of mankind.
are we the fit perſons to complain of this tranſ-
ient myſterious love? Or, does it become us
uarrel with the kindneſs of our bleſſed Lord to-
ds us, only becauſe it is greater than we can
ceive? No; it becomes us to bleſs and to adore
exceeding love, by which we are ſaved from
demnation, by which we expect to be reſcued
n death; knowing that the power of our bleſſed
d is equal to his love, and that he is *able to ſub-*
all things to himſelf.

DISCOURSE III.

PART I.

MATTHEW xi. 6.

Bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

IN the beginning of this chapter we read, that the Baptiſt ſent two of his diſciples to Chriſt, to inquire of him whether he was indeed the great Prophet ſo long expected by the people, and foretold by the prophets, or whether they were ſtill to expect and wait the coming of another. Our Saviour detained the diſciples of John, till he had made them eye-witneſſes of the mighty power that was in him. They ſaw, at the command of his word, the blind receive ſight, the lame walk, the lepers cleanſed, the deaf reſtored to hearing, and the dead raiſed up to life again: they ſaw likewiſe, that theſe mighty powers were exerciſed without giving the leaſt ſuſpicion of any worldly deſign; that no court was made to the great or wealthy by ſingling them out either for patients or for diſciples. The benefit of the miracles was chiefly the lot of the poor; and as they were better diſpoſed to receive the Goſpel, ſo were they preferred before

the rich and mighty to be the diſciples of Chri When the Baptiſt's diſciples had ſeen and hea theſe things, our Saviour thought them ſufficien enabled to ſatisfy John in the inquiry upon whi he had ſent them: *Go*, ſays he, *and ſhew John th things which ye do hear and ſee: the blind rece their ſight, and the lame walk; the lepers are clean and the deaf hear; the dead are raiſed up, and poor have the Goſpel preached to them.* Then foll immediately the words of the text: *And bleſſed he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.*

The cloſe connection of the text with the l words of the fifth verſe ſhews us what ſort of pe ſons our Saviour had in his eye, when he ſpoke the offence taken at him in the world: *The po* ſays he, *have the Goſpel preached to them: and bleſ is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* As if had ſaid, the poor are ready to embrace the Goſp and happy are in this, yea happier far, notwit ſtanding their preſent uncomfortable conditic than the honourable and the learned, who are t great, and in their own opinion too wiſe, to heark to the inſtructions of the Goſpel.

The words thus explained lead us to inquire,

Firſt, What are the offences which are genera taken at the Goſpel of Chriſt:

Secondly, From what ſource theſe offen come.

The poverty and meanneſs in which our Savio appeared, was the earlieſt, and may probably be t lateſt, objection to the Goſpel. He came frc God to convert and to ſave the world, to decla the purpoſes and the commands of the Almigh

and to exact obedience from every creature; but he came with leſs attendance and ſhew than if he had been an ordinary meſſenger from the governor of a province. Hence it is, that we ſo often find him upbraided either with the meanneſs of his parentage, the obſcurity of his country, or the preſent neceſſity of his circumſtances: *Is not this the Carpenter's ſon?* ſays one; *Can any good come out of Nazareth?* ſays another; *or any prophet out of Galilee?* ſays a third. And when they ſaw him oppreſſed with ſufferings, and weighed down with afflictions, they openly inſulted his ſorrow, and triumphed over his fond pretences to ſave the world: *Thou,* ſay they, *that deſtroyeſt the temple, and buildeſt it in three days, ſave thyſelf: If thou be the Son of God, come down from the croſs.* And ſo blinded are men with the notions of worldly greatneſs, and ſo apt to conceive of the majeſty of God according to their own ideas of power and dignity, that this prejudice has prevailed in every age. The Apoſtle to the Corinthians *preached Chriſt crucified*; but he was to the Jews *a ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs:* for the Jews *required a ſign*, a viſible temporal deliverance, and had no notion, much leſs any want, as they could apprehend, of ſuch a Saviour as Jeſus. The *Greeks ſought after wiſdom*, and thought that, if God were indeed to redeem the world, he would act more ſuitably to his power and wiſdom: whenever they made their Jupiter ſpeak, his voice was thunder, and lightning was his appearance, and he delivered oracles not to be communicated to vulgar ears. So in the Old Teſtament, when God ſpeaks, *clouds and darkneſs are*

round about him, and his preſence and his voice are terrible. But here every thing had a different turn: the appearance was in the likeneſs of a man, and in the form of a ſervant; and, as he came in like a ſervant, he went out like a ſlave, *he was eſteemed ſtricken, and his departure was taken for miſery*. His doctrine was framed rather to purify the heart, and to give wiſdom to the ſimple, than to exerciſe the head, and furniſh matter for the curious and learned; to be a general inſtruction and a common rule of life to all men, and not to ſatisfy the vanity of worldly wiſdom in inquiries above its reach. With him the precepts of virtue are the principles of wiſdom and holineſs, the greateſt ornament of the mind of man.

But theſe things the wiſe and the great men of the world find hard to reconcile with the wiſdom and majeſty of God, according to their notions of wiſdom and power. Why did not Chriſt, ſay they, appear in the power and majeſty of his Father? Would not the embaſſy have been more worthy both of God and of him? Would any prince, who had a mind to reclaim his rebellious ſubjects to obedience, not rather chooſe to ſend a perſon of honour with a ſuitable retinue, whoſe appearance might command reſpect and credit, than an ambaſſador clothed in rags and poverty, fit only to create in the rebels a greater contempt both of himſelf and his prince? If it was the purpoſe of God, that the world through faith ſhould be ſaved, would not the world more ſecurely and readily have confided in one whoſe very appearance would have ſpoke his dignity, than in one who ſeemed to be even more

miſerable than themſelves, and not able to reſcue himſelf from the vileſt and moſt contemptible death?

But let us now, in the ſecond place, conſider what foundation there is in reaſon for this great prejudice.

It is no wonder to hear men reaſon upon the notions and ideas which are familiar to them. Great power and great authority are connected with the ideas of great pomp and ſplendour; and, when we talk of the works of God, our minds naturally turn themſelves to view the great and miraculous works of providence: and this is the reaſon why men are ſlow to diſcern the hand of God in the ordinary courſe of nature, where things, being familiar to us, do not ſtrike with wonder and admiration.

When Naaman the Syrian came to the prophet of Iſrael to be cured of his leproſy, Eliſha ſent a meſſenger unto him, ſaying, *Go and waſh in Jordan ſeven times, and thy fleſh ſhall come again unto thee, and thou ſhalt be clean.* The haughty Syrian diſdained the eaſy cure, and ſcorned the prophet: Is this your man of God, and this his mighty power, to ſend me to a pitiful river of Iſrael? *Behold,* ſays he, *I thought, He will ſurely come out to me, and ſtand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and ſtrike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damaſcus, better than all the waters of Iſrael? may I not waſh in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage.* But his ſervants, not a little wiſer than their maſter, thus reaſon the caſe with him: *My father, if the prophet had bid thee do ſome great thing, wouldeſt thou*

not have done it? how much rather then, when he ſaith unto thee, Waſh, and be clean? Upon this gentle rebuke his ſtomach came down, and he condeſcended to follow the Prophet's direction; *and his fleſh came again like the fleſh of a young child, and he was clean.* Not unlike to Naaman's folly is theirs, who take offence at the poverty and meanneſs of the author of our redemption. His ſentiments and theirs agree: he expected to have ſeen ſome ſurpriſing wonder wrought for his cure; and, when he was bid only to waſh, he thought there could be nothing of God in ſo trifling a remedy. And is not this their ſenſe, who think that ſo obſcure, ſo mean a perſon as Jeſus, could never be the meſſenger of God upon ſo great an errand as the ſalvation of the world? who thus expoſtulate, Why came he not in a majeſty ſuitable to his employment, and then we would have believed him; but how can we expect to be raiſed to the glory of God by him who was himſelf the ſcorn and contempt of men?

If we ſearch this prejudice to the bottom, we ſhall find that it ariſes from a falſe conception of the power and majeſty of God, as if the ſucceſs of his purpoſes depended upon the viſible fitneſs of the inſtruments he made choice of. With men we know the caſe is ſo; they muſt uſe means which they can judge to be adapted to the end they aim at, if they intend to proſper in what they undertake: but with God it is otherwiſe. To ſtop the current even of the ſmalleſt river, banks muſt be raiſed, and ſluices cut, when the work is done by man: but in the hand of God the rod of Moſes was more than ſufficient to curb the rage of the ſea,

and force it to yield a paſſage to his people. *The fooliſhneſs of God*, ſays the Apoſtle, *is wiſer than men, and the weakneſs of God is ſtronger than men*: teaching us that we ſhould not preſume to ſit in judgment upon the methods of providence; ſince, how fooliſh or how weak ſoever they may ſeem to us, they will be found in his hand to be the wiſeſt and the ſtrongeſt. And this reaſoning the Apoſtle applies to the caſe now before us: *The croſs of Chriſt was a ſtumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs; but unto all them that are called, the power of God, and the wiſdom of God; becauſe the fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than men, and the weakneſs of God ſtronger than men.* However the Jews, or however the Greeks, conceived of the crucified Jeſus, yet to every believer he is the mighty *power of God to ſalvation*, becauſe God ordained him ſo to be; and this ordination gives full efficacy to the croſs of Chriſt, however in itſelf contemptible, and to all human appearance unfit for the purpoſe. The waters of Jordan had no natural efficacy to cleanſe a leper; in the rod of Moſes there was no power to divide the ſea: but, when ordained by God to theſe purpoſes, the ſea fled back at the touch of Moſes's rod, and the leproſy of Naaman was purged by the ſo much deſpiſed waters of Iſrael. If we would judge truly, the more ſimple and plain the methods of providence are, the more do they ſpeak the power of the Almighty. When God ſaid, *Let there be light, and there was light*, his uncontrolable power more evidently appeared, than if all the angels of heaven had been employed to produce it. When our Lord ſaid, *I will, be thou clean*, and the

perſon was cleanſed, his divinity ſhone forth more brightly, than if he had commanded all the powers above viſibly to aſſiſt him. So likewiſe, when God committed the redemption of the world to Jeſus, a man of ſorrow and affliction, and of no form or comelineſs, and gave him the power of doing ſuch works as never man did, in confirmation of his commiſſion, he appeared as plainly in him, as if he had clothed him with viſible majeſty and power. If we conſider him afflicted and tormented, and given up to a cruel death, it proves indeed that he was weak and mortal; but ſtill God is ſtrong, and not the leſs able to eſtabliſh the word which he ſpoke by this weak, this mortal man.

As to this part of the offence then, ſo far as the majeſty and power of God are concerned, it proceeds from very wrong notions in both caſes, and ſuppoſes that the majeſty of God wants the ſame little ſupports of outward pomp and grandeur as that of men does, and that his power depends upon the fitneſs of inſtrumental or material cauſes, as human power plainly does; whereas the majeſty and power of God are never more clearly ſeen, than when he makes choice of the *weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*

Let us then in the next place conſider, with reſpect to men, whether the advantages on their ſide would have been greater, had Chriſt appeared in greater ſplendour, and with more viſible power and authority.

How far the imaginations of ſome men may rove upon ſuch inquiries as theſe, or what degrees of ſplendour and glory they would judge ſufficient for

their purpoſe, I cannot tell. This we are ſure of, that the majeſty of the Almighty is not to be approached by human eyes; that therefore, whenever it deſcends to treat with men, it muſt be veiled and obſcured under ſuch repreſentations as men can bear. This is true, you will ſay; but is there no medium between the immediate preſence of God, and his appearing in the form of a ſervant, and dying, not as the children of men commonly die, but as the vileſt and moſt profligate criminal? Many degrees there are, no doubt, of viſible glory, in any of which Chriſt might have appeared, but in none with greater advantage to religion than that in which he came. Suppoſe he had come, as the Jews expected, in the form of a mighty prince, and in that ſituation had propagated his faith and doctrine; what would the unbelievers then have ſaid? How often ſhould we have been told before now, that our religion was the work of human policy, and that our prince's doctrine and dominions were extended by the ſame ſword? Was ever any religion the better thought of for having been preached at the head of an army? This is certain, that, to make religion a rational act of the mind, it cannot be conveyed to us in too eaſy and familiar a manner: the leſs awe we have of our teacher, the more freedom we ſhall exerciſe in weighing and examining his doctrines. And upon this account our Saviour's appearance was in the moſt proper form, as it gave to men the greateſt ſcope and liberty of trying and ſearching into his doctrines and pretences: and therefore his meanneſs and poverty ſhould leaſt of all be objected by thoſe who ſeem to contend

for nothing more than to clear religion from fears and prejudices.

But perhaps they will ſay, we wanted him not to appear in worldly ſtate and glory, or to exerciſe temporal dominion on earth; we would have been contented with a viſible, though an inferior kind of manifeſtation of his divine authority. *O fools, and ſlow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written!* What think ye of giving ſight to the blind; of opening the ears of the deaf; of looſening the tongue that was dumb; of reſtoring health to the ſick; of raiſing the dead to life again; of raiſing even himſelf from the grave, and aboliſhing the ſcandal of the croſs by a viſible victory and triumph over death? What do ye call theſe things? What do they manifeſt to you? Are theſe the works of that mean man, that wretched, that crucified mortal, of whom we have been ſpeaking? Do ſlaves and ſervants, nay, do princes and the greateſt of the children of men, uſe to perform ſuch works? If not, theſe are the very manifeſtations of divine power and authority which you require. Nor can it, I believe, enter into the heart of man to contrive any greater ſigns to aſk of any perſon pretending to a divine commiſſion, than theſe which our Saviour daily and publicly gave the world of his authority. Had he appeared with all the viſible power and glory which you can conceive, yet ſtill you cannot imagine what greater works than theſe he could poſſibly perform: and therefore the evidence now, under all the meanneſs of his appearance, is the ſame for his divine authority and commiſſion, as it would have been,

had he come in the greateſt pomp of glory and power.

As to us, I think, who are removed at a diſtance from the ſcene of this action, the evidence is much greater. Had he come in ſurpriſing glory, we might have ſuſpected the relations of men, who, we might well think, ſaw and heard every thing under the greateſt aſtoniſhment, and, like St. Paul when he was caught up to the third heaven, could hardly tell whether they were in the body, or out of the body. But now we have the evidence of men who lived and converſed with him familiarly, who ſaw all his mighty works, and ſaw them without ſurpriſe or aſtoniſhment, being reconciled to them by daily uſe, and the long-experienced gentleneſs and love of their Maſter; and therefore they very juſtly introduce their accounts with this aſſurance, *that they relate that only which they had heard, which they had ſeen with their eyes, which they had looked upon, and which their hands had handled, of the word of life.* So far are we then from having any juſt cauſe of offence in the poverty and meanneſs of our bleſſed Lord, that from thoſe circumſtances ariſes the great ſtability of our faith, and this comfortable aſſurance, that our faith ſtandeth not in the words or in the works of man's wiſdom and power, but in the power and in the wiſdom of the Almighty, who knows how to produce ſtrength out of weakneſs.

DISCOURSE III.

PART II.

I HAVE already examined the firſt and great prejudice againſt the Goſpel, ariſing from the poverty and meanneſs of our bleſſed Lord, and the low condition of life in which he appeared in the world, and the wretched circumſtances which put an end to it; and ſhewed it to be ſo far from being a juſt offence againſt the Goſpel, that, when fairly conſidered, it ſerves to recommend religion to us with all poſſible advantage, and the more eminently to ſet forth the love of Chriſt, and the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, in the Goſpel.

It was from the offence taken at the mean condition of our Lord, that the croſs became a *ſtumbling-block to the Jews*. It became alſo, as the Apoſtle ſays, *fooliſhneſs to the Greeks:* for they *ſought after wiſdom*; and, not finding the wiſdom they ſought after in the Goſpel, it was eſteemed by them as fooliſhneſs.

The great articles upon which all religion depends, are the nature of God, the immortality of the ſoul, and the certainty of future rewards and puniſhments in another life after this. Theſe things have ever exerciſed the wit and learning of the conſidering part of mankind, and philoſophy has

miſhed difficulties on every ſide; and, were they ll cleared up, it is thought religion would want other ſupport. But in vain do you ſearch the ɔſpel of Chriſt for a ſolution of theſe difficulties: has not ſo much as entered into them, or once empted to give an account of the nature or eſ- ıce of God, or of an human ſoul, or to conſider e difficulties that are urged by the ſchools againſt ; ſeparate exiſtence from the body. Future re- ırds and puniſhments he has indeed fully aſſerted; ıt, as to the nature and manner of them, and the ul's exiſtence in each ſtate, he has left them in- ılved in the ſame intricacies in which he found em. And yet, ſay the diſputers of this world, who ould not expect from a perſon ſent from God to ıve all his difficulties ſolved which affect the be- ef and practice of religion? We are bid to be good ıd holy, and are promiſed immortality: ſo far it is ell. But did he not know what doubts exerciſe the ıoſt learned men concerning the nature of God, and f the ſoul, and its paſſage to another world, and ɔncerning the place and condition of that other orld? Why were not theſe doubts cleared? Had e opened to us this dark ſcene of nature, and ıade us to underſtand the contexture of the ſoul, ıd its manner of ſubſiſting out of the body; had e taught us to comprehend the ſtate and nature of ıe other world; ſuch doctrines, ſuch diſcoveries ould have been ſufficient evidence of the divine iſdom: but now we are only taught the plain octrines of morality, and are bid to take his word ɔr our immortality.

To clear up this great and unreaſonable offence

againſt the Goſpel, I deſire you would conſider with me the following particulars:

Firſt, That the objection does not lie properly againſt the Goſpel of Chriſt; but, if there be any ſenſe in it, it muſt riſe higher, and ſtrike at the wiſdom and goodneſs of God in the creation: for, if any fault is to be found in this matter, it is not with Chriſt for not teaching us more wiſdom than we are capable of, but with God for not making us wiſer than we are. And hence it will appear, that the objection is both impious and ſenſeleſs.

Secondly, That this objection, allowing it its full force, does no way affect the belief or practice of religion; becauſe religion depends entirely upon the certainty of the ſoul's immortality, and of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; which certainty no way depends upon the knowledge of the nature of the things themſelves, ſince we are and may be certain of many things, the nature of which we neither do nor can know. And hence it will appear, that the difficulties ariſing from the conſideration of the nature of theſe things cannot affect our belief of the certainty of them, if it be ſupported by proper evidence; and, conſequently, that religion is no way concerned to remove theſe difficulties. And,

Thirdly, That the Goſpel has given us the greateſt evidence for the certainty and reality of theſe things, that can be thought on or deſired. And hence it will appear, that the doctrines of the Goſpel are ſuch as are adapted to the ſervice of religion, and as might be expected from a teacher divinely inſpired.

And firſt, let it be conſidered, that this objection does not lie againſt the Goſpel of Chriſt; but, if there be any force in it, it ſtrikes immediately at the wiſdom and goodneſs of God in the creation.

As long as men keep to the plain ſimple points in which religion is concerned, there is no danger of their ſplitting upon theſe inſuperable difficulties. If they ſeek after God, the whole creation will lead them to him; *for the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead.* If they ſearch after the immortality of the ſoul, and the certainty of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, theſe truths will be ſuggeſted to them from their own natural ſenſe of good and evil, and the notions of God's wiſdom and juſtice and goodneſs, compared with the preſent unequal diſtributions of rewards and puniſhments; which can be accounted for upon no other foot, nor reconciled to the natural ſenſe God has implanted in us of the difference of good and evil, and the notions we have of his excellency and perfection. But, if they launch out into philoſophical inquiries, and, not content to know that God is, without knowing what he is, endeavour to pry into the nature and manner of the exiſtence of the Almighty; or if, not ſatisfied with the moral certainty of a future ſtate, they want to look into the contexture of the ſoul, and to ſee there the natural ſeeds of immortality; it is no wonder if they make ſhipwreck both of their reaſon and their faith at once: for this knowledge is too high for men. God has not given us faculties to enable us to com-

prehend theſe myſteries of nature; and therefore we muſt always of neceſſity wander out of the way, and be bewildered, when we ſearch after them. For let any man conſider whence it is that the difficulty of theſe inquiries ariſeth: it is not for want of teaching, for all the teaching in the world will not enable men to comprehend the things of which they can form no notions or ideas. And this is the caſe: the ſeeds of this knowledge are not implanted in our nature, and therefore no cultivation can ever produce it. There is nothing which ever fell under the notice of our ſenſes, to which the exiſtence and being of God can be likened, nothing that bears any proportion of ſimilitude to the natural frame and make of our ſouls: and therefore it is impoſſible to repreſent theſe things to the mind of man; for it is not in the power of any ſound of words to create new notions or ideas in our mind, or to convey new knowledge without them. God has ſet bounds to our knowledge by limiting our faculties, beyond which our utmoſt care and diligence, however aſſiſted, cannot advance. Whatever wiſdom or excellency of knowledge may be in our teacher, it is impoſſible he ſhould infuſe more into us than we are capable of receiving; as a veſſel can never receive more than its meaſure, though it be filled out of the ſea.

This being the ſtate and condition of men, it had been to little purpoſe, if our bleſſed Lord had attempted to let them into the knowledge of thoſe great ſecrets of nature, which the curious and learned are ſo deſirous of prying into. His buſineſs was to inſtruct them in the ways of virtue and ho-

lineſs, to awaken their ſleepy ſouls and rouſe their ſtupid conſciences to a ſenſe of goodneſs, to ſhew them the way to peace and happineſs, by ſetting before them the precepts of God and nature in their true uncorrupted purity: and this he has done, even by the confeſſion of his greateſt enemies, who in this part have nothing to object, but that his laws are too good and too holy for their obſervance. It is the great excellency of a teacher to ſpeak to the ſenſe and underſtanding of the people; and, whenever he riſes above them, he is loſt in the clouds, and his words are mere air and ſound: and therefore, whatever wiſdom and knowledge were in our bleſſed Saviour, it is folly to expect from him any greater degrees of either, than we are capable of comprehending. As he was our prophet and teacher, it was his buſineſs to be underſtood; and he forbore teaching us the deep myſteries of nature, for the ſame reaſon that we do not teach children algebra, not that we envy them the knowledge, but that we know they are incapable of it. Inſtead of improving the nature of man, he muſt have deſtroyed it, and new created him, to have made him capable of a clear inſight into all the myſteries which the curious ſeem deſirous of knowing. And, could he have given us all the knowledge we thirſt after, yet ſtill the way to happineſs would be the ſame, and we could do nothing to ſet forward our ſalvation, which he has not already both inſtructed and enabled us to do: and therefore, as the caſe ſtands, he has fully performed the office of a divine teacher, having fully inſtructed us *in the things which make for our peace.*

If you will preſs this argument any farther, you muſt plead the cauſe with God, and not with Chriſt: he has taught you all that you were capable of knowing; and you muſt inquire of God, why he made you no better and no wiſer. And had it not, you will ſay, been better, if God had given us ſuch enlarged faculties, as might have enabled us to ſurmount all difficulties of this kind? If you aſk me, I can readily anſwer, that I had rather I were an angel than a man; but I know of no right I had to be either; and that I am either, is owing purely to the goodneſs and beneficence of my Creator. Had he left me ſtill in the lump of clay out of which I was formed, he had done me no injury, nor could any complaint have been formed againſt him on my behalf. For what I have, I have reaſon to be thankful; for what I have not, I have no reaſon to complain.

Had God indeed given us only the faculties of men, and required of us the ſervice of angels, we might then with ſome juſtice have lamented the unequal weight: but now that he requires nothing of us but what we are able to perform, and what, according to our preſent degree of underſtanding, it is highly reaſonable we ſhould perform, it is great perverſeneſs to hang back for want of more light, and a greater capacity to underſtand what it is no way neceſſary for us to underſtand. Our preſent faculties, if rightly applied, will lead us to a certainty of the being of a God, to the knowledge of his excellency and perfection, and will inſtruct us wherein our reaſonable ſervice to him does conſiſt: and ſhall we, when we know there is an all-ſuffi-

cient Being, and that it is our duty to ſerve him, ſhall we, I ſay, ſuſpend our duty, becauſe we meet with great difficulties in trying to comprehend his nature and manner of exiſtence? As weak as we are, we may aſſuredly know, *that God will one day judge the world in righteouſneſs, and reward every man according to his doings:* and ſhall we not liſten to this great motive to obedience, becauſe we are not able to know how the ſoul can act diſtinctly from the body, or how it can be united to it again? It would be altogether as reaſonable for a merchant not to trade to the Indies, though he is ſure there is great wealth and riches there, till he can account to himſelf for the nature of all the ſurpriſing objects in that other world; or for a man not to eat, though he is ſure it would nouriſh and ſupport his life, till he can ſee the reaſon of nutrition, and give an account of all the ſecret ways by which nature performs the work.

God has given us knowledge ſufficient to be the foundation of our duty; and, if we will uſe the light we have, we ſhall be happy. The great miſtake which men commit in reflecting upon theſe matters, is, that they ſuppoſe they ſhould have better evidence for the things of another world, could they overcome theſe difficulties, which croſs them perpetually in the ſearch after nature: and this would indeed be a real advantage to religion, if it were ſo; but that it is not, will appear in the following conſiderations: for,

Secondly, the difficulties which ariſe in conſidering the natural properties of things, do no way affect the certainty and reality of their exiſtence:

if they did, we could be certain of the real exiſtence of no one thing; ſince there is nothing but what affords us very great difficulties, when we come to account for the nature and properties of it. Let what will be the ſubject, I think, there cannot be two more different inquiries, than when we examine whether the thing really is, and when we examine what it is: they are inquiries which do not at all depend one upon the other. We can examine the properties of ſome things, without ſo much as reflecting whether there ever were ſuch things, or no. When the mathematician conſiders the properties of an exact circle or ſquare, it matters him not whether there be ſuch perfect figures in the world, or no; nor does he trouble himſelf to inquire. So, on the other hand, we can examine and come to the certainty of the exiſtence of things, without knowing, or attempting to know, their natures and properties. The peaſant knows there is a ſun and a moon, as well as the aſtronomers; and his certainty, as to their exiſtence, is as great and as well-grounded as theirs. Nor is this only true in things which are objects of ſenſe, but will hold likewiſe with reſpect to ſuch things, the exiſtence of which we collect from reaſon. From viſible effects to inviſible cauſes the argument is concluſive; though in many caſes it extends only to the reality of the cauſe, and does not in the leaſt lead us to the knowledge of the nature of it. When we ſee diſtempers cured by the uſe of plants or of drugs, ſome virtue we are ſure there is in them, upon which the effect depends, though what we ſeldom or never can tell. This being the caſe then, that

we can arrive at the knowledge of the exiſtence of things, when we are perfectly ignorant of their natures and properties; and can, on the other ſide, examine and know the properties of things, without conſidering whether they exiſt, or no; it is plain that theſe are diſtinct acts of knowledge, which do not depend on each other, and that we may be certain as to the reality of things, however we may be puzzled and confounded when we enter into the conſideration of their nature.

And now pray conſider, as to the caſe before us, what ſort of knowledge it is that is neceſſary to ſupport religion in the world. If we are ſure there is a God who will judge the world, is not that a ſufficient foundation for holineſs? Does it ſignify any thing, as to the neceſſity of our obedience, to inquire into the manner or nature of his being? Does not the whole of religion evidently depend on this queſtion, whether there certainly be a God who will judge the world? And, if it appears there is, is it of any conſequence to ſay there are great difficulties in conceiving how theſe things can be? For, if they certainly will be, they will be ſome way or other, no doubt; and it concerns not us to know which way. Since therefore our Saviour has given the greateſt evidence that can be of the certainty of a future ſtate, and the ſoul's exiſtence after death, it is impertinent and unphiloſophical to confront this evidence with difficulties ariſing from our conceptions as to the nature and manner of theſe things: it is in truth to ſet up ignorance againſt knowledge; for our difficulties ſpring from our ignorance of nature, which is an argument we

ought rather to be aſhamed of, than to bring into competition with the clear evidence we have for the certainty and reality of the things themſelves. Were this duly conſidered, it would ſet the great controverſy of religion upon the right foot, which ought to turn on this ſingle point, whether there be ſufficient evidence of a future ſtate, or no? For, if ſuch a ſtate there be, let our conceptions concerning it be clear, or not clear, moſt certainly we ſhall be brought to account for all we do; which is enough, I think, to make us careful what we do. And this is the main concern of religion, and that which will ſecure whatever is neceſſary to it.

Since then religion evidently depends upon the certainty and reality of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, and other the like articles, and not in the leaſt upon the knowledge of the nature, or the philoſophical account of theſe things; it had been abſurd in our Saviour, who was a preacher of religion only, a teacher ſent from God, to have entered into thoſe difficulties, which did not at all belong to his province. And, ſince neither the practice of religion would have received any advantage by the diſcuſſion of theſe doubts, for, if we had the knowledge of angels, and ſaw the heavens as plainly as they do, yet the ſame virtue and holineſs, without any change, would be neceſſary to carry us thither; nor the motives of religion would have gained any new ſtrength, ſince the evidence for the reality of a future ſtate is not affected by theſe doubts; it is ridiculous to expect the ſolution of them in the Goſpel, when, if ſolved, they would not ſerve any one point in which the

Goſpel is concerned, but would end in mere philoſophy and ſpeculation.

But perhaps it may be ſaid, that all this is true indeed, where the exiſtence of things is out of doubt: in that caſe no difficulties can deſtroy the evidence of their exiſtence. But, where the exiſtence of things is doubtful, there the ſeeming contradictions which ariſe in conſidering the nature of the things, do mightily ſhake the preſumption of their exiſtence. This is a fair ſtate of the caſe, and we ought to join iſſue on it.

Let us then proceed, in the third place, to ſhew, that the Goſpel has given us the greateſt evidence of our own immortality, and of a future ſtate, that can be thought on or deſired. There are two things upon which our reſurrection to life depends, as we learn from our Saviour's anſwer to the Sadducees: *Ye do err*, ſays he, *not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God:* which anſwer is a very clear one; for we can deſire no more than to know that God certainly can raiſe us, and that he certainly will. The firſt is to be learnt from our natural notions of God; the ſecond from the Scripture, which is the declaration of his will to mankind. As to the power of God, it cannot be brought into queſtion, without throwing off all pretence even to natural religion: for, if you allow God, that he made the world, and formed man into a living ſoul in the beginning; you cannot deny but that he, who made man out of nothing at firſt, can as eaſily make him again, after death has diſſolved the vital union. It remains then to inquire after the will of God, whether he, who certainly can, certainly will

raiſe us at the laſt day? The time will not permit me to enter largely into the argument; and therefore I ſhall reſt it upon one, but that a very clear point. It will not be denied but that we have our Saviour's promiſe and word for our reſurrection often repeated in the Goſpel: and conſider, pray, did not he raiſe many dead to life again? Did he not at laſt raiſe himſelf from the grave, after he had been three days buried? Is it not plain then, upon the Goſpel account, that he had the power of raiſing the dead? and is it not as plain, that he has promiſed to raiſe us? Take both propoſitions together then, and they will amount to this; that he, who has the power of raiſing the dead, has promiſed and declared that he will raiſe us from the dead. God, we know, cannot lie, and therefore muſt ratify every word which *he ſpoke by his holy child Jeſus:* and hence ariſes a ſecurity which no doubts can ſhake. Beſides, as to difficulties in nature and philoſophy, he has not indeed taught us to anſwer them; but he fully anſwered them himſelf, when he came from the grave; as he who got up and walked, baffled all the philoſopher's arguments againſt motion.

It is true, you will ſay, this is very good evidence, but you find it hard to believe: and perhaps you might have been as hard of belief, if our Saviour had reaſoned never ſo philoſophically. The queſtion is, whether any objection lies againſt the Goſpel for overlooking the difficulties which learned men raiſe? I have ſhewed that none can lie, and that the Goſpel has given a much better evidence than that which is deſired: and this is

ficient to remove the offence taken upon the ac-
unt of this ſuppoſed defect in the Goſpel. If
1 believe not the Goſpel, that alters not the caſe:
: evidence is not the worſe for that; for neither
uld you believe perhaps, *though one roſe from the*
id.

DISCOURSE III.

PART III.

THE prejudices which men are apt to conceive againſt the Goſpel, are of different kinds, according to the different views under which they conſider it. When they ſet themſelves to examine the pretenſions it has to be a divine revelation, they ſtumble at the meanneſs and poverty of its author; imagining that, if God were to ſend a perſon into the world upon ſo conſiderable an errand, he would clothe him with a majeſty becoming one immediately commiſſioned by himſelf, and which might better ſupport the great undertaking: or, if they conſider the Goſpel as the word of God, given to men for their inſtruction in all things pertaining to the ſervice of God, they expect to find all their doubts and difficulties removed, which are any way related to the cauſe of religion; ſuch, for inſtance, as relate to the nature of the ſoul, its manner of ſubſiſting out of the body, and to the nature and condition of the future ſtate which we are bid to expect: and, not finding theſe difficulties conſidered and removed, they are apt to conclude that this revelation has not all the marks of wiſdom

which are to be expected in one coming immediately from God.

Theſe offences have been already conſidered: but, as ſome are offended at the Goſpel for not clearing the doubts and difficulties which encumbered the notions of religion before, ſo others take offence at the new doctrines introduced into religion by the Goſpel, and complain of the hardſhip put upon them in requiring them to believe things which are not ſuggeſted to them by natural reaſon, nor are to be maintained by it. Even of our Saviour's diſciples we find many offended at his doctrine, and complaining to each other, *This is an hard ſaying; who can hear it?* And ſo far did their prejudice prevail, *that they went back, and walked no more with him.*

The Goſpel, it is ſaid, contains many myſterious truths: and what purpoſe of religion can be ſerved by our receiving articles of faith which we do not underſtand? Shall we be the better men for it? Will it make us more juſt, or holy, or beneficent to our brethren? Will it promote the honour of God to repreſent him as requiring ſuch conditions from us, the end or uſe of which we cannot diſcern? Or, will it recommend religion to the world? Will men be the more forward to ſubmit, when they muſt firſt renounce their ſenſe and underſtanding, and ceaſe to be rational, in order to be religious?

This is a very heavy charge, and, were it as true as it is heavy, might poſſibly ſhake the foundations of the Goſpel. But, to ſet this matter in a clear light, I muſt deſire you to obſerve the different notions which belong to the word myſtery in the uſe

of the Goſpel, and in vulgar uſe among men at this time: and, by thus diſtinguiſhing the uſe or ſenſe of the word, it will appear,

Firſt, that the objection does not reach the Goſpel ſenſe or uſe of the word, nor can affect the myſteries contained in the Goſpel: and,

Secondly, that the uſe and ſenſe of the word, which is liable to this objection, does not any way belong to the Goſpel; nor are there any ſuch myſteries in the Goſpel as may juſtify the complaint made againſt them.

Firſt then, If you look into the ſacred writers, you will find, that the whole deſign of the Goſpel, the diſpenſation of providence in the ſalvation of mankind, is ſtyled a myſtery; *the hidden wiſdom of God, which was kept ſecret ſince the world began:* a myſtery it is called, becauſe it was kept ſecret ſince the world began, God not having opened or declared his gracious purpoſes before the coming of Chriſt. With reſpect to this time of ſecrecy and ſilence the Goſpel is called a myſtery; but, upon the revelation of it by Chriſt Jeſus, it is no longer looked upon as a myſtery, but as the manifeſtation of God's will and goodneſs to men. Thus you will find St. Paul ſpeaking in the laſt of the Romans: *The myſtery which was kept ſecret ſince the world began, but now is made manifeſt, and by the ſcriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlaſting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:* that is, this great work was a myſtery in all ages, being kept ſecret in the counſels of God; but, ſince the coming of Chriſt, it is no longer a myſtery, but is manifeſt and made

known to all nations and people. Here then, you ſee plainly, the oppoſition is between myſtery and revelation: what God has reſerved to himſelf, without communicating the knowledge of it to the world, that is a myſtery; what he has revealed, is no longer a myſtery, but a manifeſtation of his will and purpoſe. In this ſenſe, I preſume, there lies no objection againſt the Goſpel: that it was once hidden in the ſecret counſels of providence, but is now, by the revelation of Chriſt Jeſus, made known to all men, can afford us no matter of complaint, but may adminiſter to us great joy, and be a ſubject of praiſe and glory to God; inaſmuch as our eyes have ſeen, and our ears heard, thoſe things, which many righteous men and prophets have *deſired to ſee, and have not ſeen them, and to hear, and have not heard them.*

As the Goſpel itſelf is in this ſenſe ſtyled a myſtery, ſo are the ſeveral parts of it likewiſe: *I ſhew you a myſtery*, ſays St. Paul; *we ſhall not all ſleep, but we ſhall all be changed.* He did not mean that he would ſhew them what they could not comprehend, but that he would declare to them the purpoſe of God, which they were ignorant of. The ſame uſe of the word you may meet with in our bleſſed Saviour himſelf: when he had deſcribed the future ſtate of the church in parables to the Jews, and came afterwards to explain them to the diſciples, he tells them the reaſon of his proceeding: *Becauſe*, ſays he, *unto you it is given to know the myſteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them it is not given.* All futurities, becauſe known only to God, are myſteries; but, when revealed, they are no longer ſo, being made

known and manifeſt. Thus, it is plain, St. Paul uſes the word in 1 Cor. xiii. where he joins the gift of prophecy and the knowledge of myſteries together: *Though I have*, ſays he, *the gift of prophecy, and underſtand all myſteries and all knowledge:* where it is plain what he means by myſteries, ſince they are to be underſtood by the gift of prophecy. In the fourth chapter of the ſame epiſtle he ſhews what account we are to make of our paſtors and teachers: *Let a man*, ſays he, *ſo account of us, as of the miniſters of Chriſt, and ſtewards of the myſteries of God.* His meaning is not, that they were preachers of myſteries in the vulgar notion of it, that is, of things which nobody can underſtand; but that God had entruſted them with his purpoſes and intentions in the ſalvation of mankind, which they, like good ſtewards, were to diſpenſe to the whole family, by declaring and revealing the whole will of God.

The ſame Apoſtle ſays, chap. ii. 7. *We ſpeak the wiſdom of God in a myſtery*; and in the next words explains what he means by myſtery, *even the hidden wiſdom which God ordained before the world to our glory:* and in the tenth verſe he tells us, this is no longer hidden, but the myſtery is laid open; *God having revealed it unto us by his Spirit.* In the ſame ſenſe we read of the *myſtery of faith:* where we are not to underſtand the Apoſtle to mean incomprehenſible articles of faith, but the revelations of God's purpoſes and deſigns, which through faith we receive, and are therefore ſtyled the myſteries of faith.

In this ſenſe the Goſpel is full of myſteries, as containing the ſecret purpoſes of God's hidden wiſ-

i in the redemption of the world, which were
le manifeſt by Chriſt Jeſus, *who brought life and*
rtality to light. Againſt this Goſpel ſenſe of
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et us then, in the ſecond place, proceed to
v, that the notion of myſteries, againſt which
objection lies, does not belong to the Goſpel.
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ıgs which proceed from the hidden wiſdom of
l. All the ſecret purpoſes of Providence are,
he ſenſe of the Scripture, myſteries; as likewiſe
knowledge which God has not revealed. Of
h myſteries are there many: but then they con-
ı not us to inquire after; if they did, God
ıld reveal them to us. God has declared to us,
: he has an only-begotten Son, and that he
the perſon who came down from heaven for
deliverance: that he has an holy Spirit, who

ſhall ſanctify our hearts, and be aſſiſting to us in working out our ſalvation. This, and agreeable to this, is the Scripture doctrine: and a man would be put to it to fix any abſurdity, or ſo much as ſeeming contradiction, upon this doctrine, or any thing ſaid concerning it in Scripture. Concerning theſe perſons there are indeed exceeding great myſteries, which are not revealed: God has not told us, or enabled us to conceive, how his Son and his Spirit dwell in him, or how they came from him. Theſe therefore are properly myſteries, which are hidden in the ſecret wiſdom of God, and which we are no where called upon to inquire after. It is eaſy, I think, to take God's word, that he has a Son and a Spirit, who dwell with him and in him from all eternity; a Son who came to our aſſiſtance, a Spirit who is ever with us to guide us into truth: theſe things, I ſay, are eaſy to be believed, without entering into the difficulties ariſing from natural and philoſophical inquiries, which the Scripture no where encourages us to ſeek after: and, as long as men keep cloſe to the rule and doctrine of Scripture, they will find no cauſe to enter into the great complaints raiſed againſt myſteries. The Scripture has revealed indeed wonderful things to us, and for the truth of them has given us as wonderful evidence; ſo that they are well qualified to be the objects of our faith: for ſuch God deſigned them, and not for the exerciſe of our vanity and curioſity, or, as you call it, of our reaſon. If it is not reaſonable to believe God upon the Goſpel evidence, there is an end of all myſteries; but, if it is reaſonable, there muſt be an end of all

ther inquiries: and I think common ſenſe will ch us not to call God to account, or pretend to er into the reaſon of his doings.

DISCOURSE IV.

PART I.

1 Cor. i. 21.

For after that, in the wiſdom of God, the world by wiſdom knew not God, it pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe.

In the wiſdom of God, the world by wiſdom knew not God. There is ſome difficulty in aſcertaining the preciſe meaning of the firſt words; *in the wiſdom of God.* Some underſtand the meaning to be, that, ſince the world, *in the wiſdom of God,* i. e. by contemplating the wiſdom of God in the great works of the creation, had not *by wiſdom,* i. e. by the exerciſe of their reaſon, arrived to the true knowledge of God, it pleaſed God to take another method, and *by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe.* But ſince this difficulty does not affect the main aſſertions of the Apoſtle in the text, I will not ſpend time in inquiring what has been, or may be, ſaid upon this point.

The main aſſertions of the Apoſtle in the text are two:

Firſt, that the world by wiſdom knew not God.

Secondly, that it pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave believers.

The language made uſe of here by St. Paul may want explaining; for it may ſeem ſtrange, that the preaching of the Goſpel ſhould by an Apoſtle of Chriſt be called *the fooliſhneſs of preaching*. But the meaning and language of St. Paul will be accounted for by conſidering what led him to this kind of expreſſion.

The doctrine of the croſs, and of the redemption of the world by the death and paſſion of Chriſt, was received by the great pretenders to wiſdom and reaſon with ſcorn and contempt: *The Greeks*, ſays the Apoſtle, *ſeek after wiſdom—and Chriſt crucified is to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*. The pride of learning and philoſophy had ſo poſſeſſed the polite parts of the heathen world, that they could not ſubmit to a method of ſalvation which was above the reach of their philoſophy, and which refuſed to be tried by the diſputes and ſubtilties of their ſchools. The Apoſtle, ver. 17, ſays, *Chriſt ſent him to preach the Goſpel, not with the wiſdom of words*. The wiſdom of the world, thus diſcarded, took its revenge of the Goſpel, and called it *the fooliſhneſs of preaching*. Be it ſo, ſays the Apoſtle; yet by this *fooliſhneſs* of preaching God intends to ſave them who believe: for this method is of God, and not of man; *and the fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than men*. You ſee what led St. Paul to uſe this expreſſion, and to call the preaching of the Goſpel the fooliſhneſs of preaching. The great and the learned ſo eſteemed it, and ſo called it: the Apoſtle ſpeaks to them in their own language, and calls upon them in the text

to compare their much-boaſted wiſdom with this fooliſhneſs of preaching, and to judge of them by their effects: the world by *wiſdom knew not God*; but the *fooliſhneſs* of preaching is *ſalvation* to every believer.

Whether this charge of ignorance imputed to the Gentile world be true, or no, is a matter depending on the evidence of hiſtory: if it be not true, there can be no difficulty in diſproving it: the time and place may be named, when and where the true knowledge of God prevailed, and religion in its purity was profeſſed by the people. But this has not been attempted, nor will it be, by any one who is acquainted with the hiſtory of the ancient world.

It may be hard perhaps to account for the general corruption of religion which prevailed in the world; eſpecially when we conſider how abſolutely abſurd, and contrary to common ſenſe, many of the ſuperſtitious rites were, which had ſpread themſelves over the heathen world. We can ſcarcely conceive what ſhould move men to conſecrate birds and beaſts, ſtocks and ſtones, and to fall down and worſhip them. But, theſe follies being once introduced, and propagated from father to ſon, it is eaſy to account for the great difficulty of removing them. Cuſtom and education, and the reverence which men naturally have for what they eſteem to be religion, were foundations too ſtrong to be removed by the reaſoning and ſpeculations of a few who were ſomething wiſer than the reſt, and ſaw perhaps many and great abſurdities in the common practice: and, though there did appear in the hea-

then world ſome ſuch great and good men, who were as lights ſhining in a dark place; yet was there not one found able to extricate himſelf from all the ſuperſtition of his country, much leſs to reduce the people to a practice conſonant to the pure principles of natural religion. And it is an obſervation true in itſelf, and of great weight in this caſe, that not one country, nay not one city, ever embraced the principles of pure natural religion upon the ſtrength of their own reaſon, or upon conviction from the reaſon and wiſdom of others. And, ſince the world continued under idolatry for many ages together before the coming of Chriſt, notwithſtanding that they had as much ſenſe and reaſon in thoſe days as we have in ours, what pretence is there to imagine that they would not have continued in the ſame ſtate to this day, if the light of the Goſpel had not appeared?

Whoever conſiders this matter ſeriouſly and fairly, cannot but be convinced of the truth of the Apoſtle's aſſertion, that *by wiſdom the world knew not God.*

As to the ſecond propoſition, *That it hath pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe*; as far as true notions of God and religion are neceſſary means of ſalvation, the truth of the aſſertion will be admitted.

The enemies of revelation will of themſelves, and in ſpite of themſelves, bear witneſs ſo far to this truth. They now ſee clearly the great truths of religion; they can now demonſtrate the being and attributes of God, and from the relation we bear to him deduce the duties owing to him, the worſhip,

nd the purity of the worſhip, that is to be paid im. Are they wiſer than all who lived before hem? or do they owe this new degree of light and nowledge to ſome advantage which others before hem had not? They will hardly ſay they are wiſer han all who lived when learning and arts and ciences flouriſhed in the Eaſt, in Greece, and at Rome; and, ſhould they ſay it, it will be harder till to believe them: and yet what one advantage ave they above the others, this only excepted, that n their days the light of the Goſpel has been pread over the world?

But, however, this compariſon between the wiſe nd learned of different ages will not determine the aſe before us; for religion is not made for ſcholars nly: the uſe of it is to govern and direct the world, and to influence the practice of mankind. And the great queſtion lies between the religion of the world in general before the coming of Chriſt, and ſince; and the influence which religion in one ſtate and the other naturally had, or may be ſuppoſed to have had, by juſt conſequence, on the morality of mankind. To give you an account of the religion and divinity of the vulgar in the days of heatheniſm, would be to entertain you with an hiſtory of folly and ſuperſtition; ſome parts of which for the barbarity of them, and ſome for the lewdneſs of them, are very unfit to be related in a Chriſtian congregation. The people thought of their gods much after the rate that the poets write of them; and their ſacred hiſtory was an account of the battles and quarrels, and of the loves and amours of their deities. Their practice in religion

was agreeable to their articles of belief: their impure deities were worſhipped in acts of impurity or barbarity: and how could it be otherwiſe? for, when vice itſelf was conſecrated, and had temples dedicated to it, how could the worſhippers be untainted?

But conſider now how the caſe ſtands in countries where the Goſpel is preached in any tolerable degree of purity. The common people now are no greater reaſoners than they were formerly: yet go into our villages, you will find there a firm perſuaſion of the unity of God, who made heaven and earth, and all things in them: the meaneſt of the people will tell you, that an honeſt heart is the only acceptable ſacrifice to God, and that there is no way to pleaſe him but by doing juſtly and righteouſly.

Let me aſk now, whence comes this change? Is it for the better, or no? If it is, ſurely the world is greatly indebted to the hand that wrought this change, that rooted out all the falſe notions deſtructive of virtue and the happineſs of mankind, and planted in the room thereof principles which do ſo much honour and glory to God, and are full of preſent peace and future hopes for the children of men.

I am aware that it will be ſaid, that the common people now are no more able to give a reaſon of the faith that is in them, than their heatheniſh anceſtors were before them; and that cuſtom and the prejudices of education have influenced both equally; and that theſe Chriſtians, had they been born heathens, would have been heathens, or, if Mahometans, they would have been ſtill Mahometans.

Suppoſe the caſe to be ſo, and conſider whether we are not extremely obliged to revelation even upon this foot.

If men are naturally influenced by cuſtom and the force of education to follow the opinions and practices of their country, and are, after all that has been ſaid to exalt human reaſon, incapable to deliver themſelves from popular and national errors by the ſtrength of their own reaſon; two things muſt, I think, be admitted:

Firſt, that it was a great undertaking, and the work of a very extraordinary power, to root out ancient errors, which had for many ages had poſſeſſion of the whole world: And,

Secondly, that it was an act of great wiſdom and goodneſs, as well as power, to introduce juſt principles and notions of religion, and, by giving them at firſt a firm eſtabliſhment, to throw the weight of cuſtom and education on the ſide of virtue and true religion, in oppoſition to ſuperſtition and vice.

The firſt propoſition cannot be diſputed; for, if the power of cuſtom and education be as great as it is repreſented, the power muſt be very great that gets the better of it: and I believe it will be hard to ſhew from hiſtory, that ever a nation was reaſoned out of their religious errors: it has been done by the power of miracles, and by the power of the ſword; but in this laſt method the nation and its errors have been commonly deſtroyed together. However, the Goſpel was not introduced by external force; and therefore the work muſt neceſſarily be aſcribed to a power of another kind.

As to the ſecond propoſition, it may be thought diſhonourable to true religion to ſuppoſe it to be at all beholden to cuſtom and education for its ſupport; diſhonourable to God, to ſuppoſe that he can make uſe of any thing to propagate religion, but the reaſon and underſtanding of his creatures; and, conſequently, that true religion is no longer religion, when it ſtands by the force of cuſtom and education.

I know how much has been ſaid of the uſe of reaſon in religion, to the excluſion of all other helps: but I know too that the holy writers frequently call on us *to train up a child in the way he ſhould go*, and give this reaſon for it, *that when he is old he will not depart from it.* I know too that God called Abraham, and made of him a great nation, *becauſe he knew him, that he would teach his children after him to keep the commandments of the Lord:* which precept to inſtruct children betimes, and which declaration on God's part in relation to Abraham, cannot ſtand with a ſuppoſition that true religion is the worſe for the ſupport it has from example and education.

But to conſider this matter a little farther: if we know any thing with certainty of mankind, it is this; that their principles, opinions, and practices are ſtrongly influenced by cuſtom and education. I will aſk any man, whether he thinks it poſſible to alter this ſtate of things, and to make all men as much philoſophers, and as much above prejudices, as ſome pretend to be? I believe no man in his ſenſes ever thought this poſſible. If then men are, and ever will be as long as they continue men,

atly governed by cuſtom and education, the gle queſtion is, whether it was an act beneficent mankind, and becoming the wiſdom of God, to ect this influence to the ſide of virtue and true igion in order to make men happy, rather than leave them to be miſerable under the ſtrong in-ence to vice, ſuperſtition, and idolatry, which l poſſeſſion of the world?

The true end of religion is to make men better, lead them to a due diſcharge of their duty to d and to man. True principles and right and t notions of God will lead men to a juſt perform-e of their duty, independently of this conſidera-n, whether their principles are the reſult of their n reaſoning, or inſtilled into them by education. this be ſo, the common people, whoſe religion is ays treated as their prejudices, are as capable of forming the duties of religion, and as acceptably the ſight of God, as the greateſt reaſoners and iloſophers.

Let us ſuppoſe, that ſome wiſe man had fully nvinced himſelf by reaſon of the being of God, the holineſs of his nature, and that he is a re-rder of all thoſe who diligently ſeek him: ſup-ſe too, that a plain countryman, not able to make luctions in a courſe of reaſoning, was yet fully rſuaded of the ſame truths from his Bible, or the ſtruction of his pariſh-prieſt: I ſay, in this caſe, at the countryman's principles are as good a ndation for all the duties and purpoſes of reli-n as the philoſopher's; that they will be as be-ficial to the world in making a good father, huſ-nd, or maſter, and as beneficial to the man in

making him happy here and hereafter: and, though his inſtruction, compared with the philoſopher's deep knowledge, may, in the language of St. Paul, be called the *fooliſhneſs of preaching*, yet will it, if duly attended to, *make him wiſe unto ſalvation.*

I am not placing religion upon prejudice as its proper foundation: no; the Goſpel was at firſt introduced by the ſtrongeſt appeal to reaſon, when it was introduced by the hand of God in ſigns and wonders and mighty works, which the Apoſtle calls the *demonſtration of the Spirit*, and oppoſes it to the *wiſdom of the world:* and the Goſpel ſtands upon the ſame reaſon ſtill. But this is a reaſon which, the wiſe ones of the world think, can produce nothing but prejudice, or ſuch faith as differs but little from it. This then I ſay, that it was worthy of God, by a ſtrong hand and outſtretched arm, in ſigns and wonders to beat down ſuperſtition and idolatry, and the corrupt notions of the world; and to plant in the room of them, not by the arts of man's wiſdom, but by theſe demonſtrations of the Spirit, true principles of reaſon and religion; to give them poſſeſſion in the world, that they might be delivered down from generation to generation, and maintained under the natural influence which cuſtom and education have, and always will have, upon mankind.

And, if we conſider revelation in this light only, as removing falſe principles of error and ſuperſtition, and introducing juſt ones of truth and religion, independently of the reaſon and evidence on which the Goſpel ſtands, it muſt appear to be an act of divine love and goodneſs, which we ought to receive

with thankfulneſs. If men were ſuppoſed to be quite incapable of entering at all into the reaſon of things, and to be wholly guided by prejudice and cuſtom, yet ſurely even then it would be an act of love to draw out of their minds principles full of miſchief to themſelves and others, and place in their room principles of love and benevolence to make themſelves and others happy. And ſurely this at leaſt muſt be allowed to the Goſpel, that it did in fact expel the falſe and pernicious notions of heatheniſm, and introduce principles upon which men may be at peace and in friendſhip with God and with each other. And from hence perhaps we may ſee the reaſon why miracles were ſo frequent in the beginning of the Goſpel, and why they ceaſed afterwards. They were neceſſary till truth had poſſeſſion of the world; but truth, throughly eſtabliſhed, was left to be propagated by the natural means of inſtruction and education.

Every body ſees what miſchief and wickedneſs are often produced by falſe and corrupt opinions and principles; which owe not their ſtrength to reaſon, for with reaſon they have no alliance, but to the poſſeſſion they have of the mind. Good principles, with the ſame advantage of poſſeſſion, will be as powerful to good purpoſes, though the mind diſcerns not the reaſon from whence they flow. There are but few workmen, perhaps, who know the reaſon, and can demonſtrate the mechanic powers of the inſtruments they uſe; but, being perfect in the uſe and application of theſe powers, they are able workmen and maſter-builders; which is all that is required of them. In like manner, if

true religion is ſo introduced into the mind, as to work in the heart of man, and make him upright and honeſt, the end and purpoſe of religion is anſwered.

To anſwer this end of religion were the preachers of the Goſpel ſent into the world: the errand was worthy of him who ſent them; whoſe goodneſs and mercy inclined him to teach men the way to happineſs, but not to flatter their vanity and pride of knowledge. The doctrines of the Goſpel are not the worſe for being *fooliſhneſs to the Greeks, and a ſtumbling-block to the Jews*; ſince they are, and on experience appear to be, *the power of God to ſalvation to all who believe.*

DISCOURSE IV.

PART II.

IN treating on this ſubject, I have already obſerved to you, that there are two propoſitions or aſſertions contained in the words of the text:

Firſt, That the world by wiſdom knew not God.

Secondly, That it pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave believers.

It being allowed in general, that the world was groſsly ignorant and ſuperſtitious, and unacquainted with the true notion of God, and the religion that was to be paid him; yet it will ſtill be ſaid, that there were ſome, ſome few at leaſt, who had extricated themſelves from theſe popular errors; who ſaw and acknowledged one ſupreme Being, the cauſe of all things; who had clear and diſtinct notions of morality, and of the duties owing from man to man. The writings of ſome of theſe great men are ſtill extant; and, if we conſult only Plato, Ariſtotle, and the Roman philoſopher Tully, we may ſee how far reaſon and philoſophy could and did carry theſe men in matters of religion and morality.

From theſe and ſuch-like inſtances we are apt to form a general notion of the powers of human rea-

ſon; and the argument appears undeniable: thus far human reaſon did go without the help of the Goſpel; thus far therefore it certainly can go.

It may be worth our while to conſider this caſe, not with an intent to depreciate the worth of theſe, the beſt and greateſt men of antiquity, but to ſtate it clearly and fairly, as far as it does, or may be ſuppoſed to affect the argument for the neceſſity of revelation.

Suppoſing then, in the firſt place, all that is ſaid of theſe wiſe men to be true, and that they did arrive at a clear and diſtinct knowledge of God, and of the religion that was due to him; yet it will weigh but little in the preſent conſideration, for this plain reaſon; becauſe religion, if it is of any uſe at all, is equally of uſe to all men: for, ſince all men live under the impreſſion of natural conſcience, and the ſenſe of being accountable for their actions, they all equally want direction; and, as the experience of the world ſhews, all men will have ſome religion, either good or bad. To ſay therefore that reaſon was ſufficient for the purpoſes of religion before the publication of the Goſpel, and to prove it by ſhewing that it ſerved this purpoſe in four or five inſtances in an age, whilſt millions and millions had no help from it, is quite miſtaking the point: we want ſomething to be of uſe to all men, and which all men ſtand in need of to their well-being: you have found ſomething that will ſerve perhaps one in a million, and think that you have diſcovered an adequate ſupply for the general want. But what muſt become of the many thouſands who are incapable of being the better for your method? If the

whole nation were infected with the plague, it would be worth while to ſend even to the Indies for a man who could cure them; but, if his remedy could cure only two or three in the kingdom, it would be of no great conſequence whether he came, or ſtaid away.

But it may be ſaid, that what reaſon did for a few, it was capable of doing for all, if it had been duly attended to; and, conſequently, that reaſon was a ſufficient foundation for true religion, notwithſtanding that true religion was loſt in the world; which was not through a defect in reaſon, but through the abuſe and miſapplication of it by the generality of mankind.

I agree the caſe to be ſo; but we are ſtill where we were before: for this general abuſe of reaſon, or inattention to the voice of it, which had ſpread over the whole world, had certainly a root in ſome general evil and corruption that had infected mankind: and, whatever reaſon was in itſelf, yet it ſtood in great want of a remedy for this evil, that had ſo univerſally darkened and obſcured it. Suppoſe I ſhould ſay ſuch a man was blind; will it be a proper reply to ſay, No, his eyes are ſound and good, excepting only that there is a very thick film over them, which intercepts all ſight? or would it be proper to inſiſt that the man wanted no cure, becauſe he had ſound eyes? What ſhall we do with his film then? for, till it is removed, the man might as well be without eyes. This was the very caſe of the heathen world. You ſay they had reaſon ſufficient for all the purpoſes of religion: be it ſo; yet, in fact, it is certain they were never able

to make this uſe of it for ages together. Since the coming of Chriſt the world has been able to make this uſe of their reaſon: and now, at laſt, it is become a great queſtion, whether a cure has been wrought, or no.

But conſider farther, when we talk of reaſon abſtractedly as a principle of human actions, it is right to ſay that reaſon can do whatever we ſee any man perform by the help of his reaſon; and therefore it is true that reaſon can meaſure the magnitude and diſtances of the heavenly bodies: but is it alſo true that every man's reaſon can do this? by no means; and therefore to conſider all men as capable of doing what we ſee ſome great geniuſes able to do, is abſolutely abſurd. Now, the few whom you ſuppoſe to have attained to a juſt notion of God and of religion in the heathen world, what were they? Men brought up in retirement and ſtudy, of great induſtry and application, who ſpent their lives in ſearching into the cauſes of things: and, even of thoſe many who followed this method of life and ſtudy, there are but few who can with any pretence be ſaid to have diſcovered the truth: the crowd of philoſophers talked much more, but knew as little as the people. But the people themſelves, what muſt become of them? they have no time for ſtudy, and they muſt have true notions of religion at a cheaper rate, or not at all. As religion is a thing in which all men are concerned, it muſt be conveyed in a manner that ſuits men of all conditions. Suppoſing therefore that you have found a way by which ſome few thoughtful men obtained true notions of religion, you are far from having found a way of pro-

pagating true religion in the world. Reaſoning will not do the buſineſs: and therefore the Goſpel ſet out in another manner, by propoſing the great truths of religion in the plaineſt and ſimpleſt manner in an authoritative way, but by an authority ſupported by the plaineſt and the ſtrongeſt proof, the proof of miracles; an argument that was adapted to men of all conditions, and made its way to every underſtanding.

It is become a faſhion to dreſs up the great doctrines and proofs of religion in axioms and theorems and demonſtrations; and thoſe who have taken pains in this way may have done great ſervice to men of thought and contemplation: but, had the Goſpel ſet out at firſt with this air of mathematics, it had loſt one ſtrong proof of its divine original, ariſing from the plainneſs of its doctrine, and the ſimplicity of the evidence which was offered in its behalf; which made the Goſpel to be a proper tender to all mankind. All mankind are concerned in the great truths of religion; and nothing can be more abſurd, and contradictory to the notion of God's wiſdom and goodneſs, than to ſuppoſe God to intend to eſtabliſh true religion in the world, and yet to offer it in a method which could poſſibly have an influence but on very few. Whoever will reflect ſeriouſly on the nature and condition of mankind in general, will be able to give himſelf a clear reaſon why God did not call in the aſſiſtance of the *wiſdom of the world* to propagate the Goſpel, but choſe rather to eſtabliſh it by the *fooliſhneſs of preaching*, as it is called, and by the *demonſtration of*

the Spirit, manifeſted in ſigns and wonders and mighty works.

I have hitherto conſidered this plea, drawn from the caſe of ſome great men in the heathen world, upon ſuppoſition that what is ſaid of them is true, and that they had indeed extricated themſelves from the ſuperſtitions of their country, and attained juſt notions of true religion: but this thing, which has been often ſaid, has never been proved, and I am afraid never will.

I do not wonder that thoſe who have been converſant in the writings of the ancients, and have been entertained with the juſt and fine reflections to be met with on the attributes of God, conſidered as maker and governor of the world, and of mankind in particular, ſhould conclude that thoſe who thought and talked ſo clearly of the great attributes of the Deity, and of his providence over the world, had alſo as clear notions of the religious ſervice due to him, and to him only. What has led to this concluſion I conceive to be this: there is ſo plain a connection between the relation we bear to God, and the religious duty owing to him, and the argument is ſo familiar to us, that we almoſt naturally ſuppoſe that every man, who maintains the principle, cannot fail of ſeeing the concluſion.

The concluſion indeed is ſo natural, that, if it were overlooked, nothing can more ſenſibly prove the weakneſs of human reaſon in oppoſition to inveterate errors and ſuperſtition; and nothing can more effectually ſhew us how unable theſe wiſe men were to reform the world, ſince with all their wiſ-

dom they were not able to reform themſelves. Yet this was the truth of the caſe; and it was not at random, and without knowledge of the fact, that St. Paul lays this to the charge of the wiſe men of the world, *that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their fooliſh heart was darkened. Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beaſts, and creeping things.*

To prove the truth of the Apoſtle's aſſertion, that even the wiſe men, who *knew God, did not glorify him as God*, by an induction of particulars, would be undertaking a work which could hardly be well diſcharged in this place. But yet the point is too material to be paſſed over in ſilence. Let us then conſider the caſe of one only, but of one, who among the good men was the beſt, and among the wiſe ones the wiſeſt. I ſhall eaſily be underſtood to mean Socrates, the great philoſopher of Athens: and, were the wiſe men of antiquity to plead their cauſe in common, they could not put their defence into better hands.

We have an account of the ſpeculative opinions of many of the wiſe men of Greece preſerved to us in authors of great credit; but of their practice, and perſonal behaviour in life, little is ſaid: which makes it hard to judge how far their own practice and conduct was influenced by their opinions, or how conſiſtent they were in purſuing the conſequences of their own doctrines. The caſe might have been the ſame with Socrates, had not a very

particular circumſtance put him under a neceſſity of explaining his conduct and practice with reſpect to the religion of his country. He had talked ſo freely of the heathen deities, and the ridiculous ſtories told of them, that he fell under a ſuſpicion of deſpiſing the gods of his country, and of teaching the youth of Athens to deſpiſe their altars and their worſhip. Upon this accuſation he is ſummoned before the great court of the Areopagites; and happily the apology he made for himſelf is preſerved to us by two the ableſt of his ſcholars, and the beſt writers of antiquity, Plato and Xenophon: and from both their accounts it appears, that Socrates maintained and aſſerted before his judges, that he worſhipped the gods of his country, and that he ſacrificed in private and in public upon the allowed altars, and according to the rites and cuſtoms of the city. After this public confeſſion, ſo authentically reported by two ſo able hands, there can be no doubt of his caſe. He was an idolater, and had not, by his great knowledge and ability in reaſoning, delivered himſelf from the practice of the ſuperſtition of his country. You ſee how far the wiſdom of the world could go: give me leave to ſhew you what the fooliſhneſs of preaching could do in the very ſame caſe.

St. Paul was in the ſame caſe: he was accuſed in the ſame city of Athens of the ſame crime, that he was a ſetter-forth of ſtrange gods; and before the ſame great court of Areopagites he made his apology, which is likewiſe preſerved to us by St. Luke in the ſeventeenth chapter of the Acts. We have then the greateſt and the ableſt among the wiſe men of

Greece, and an Apoſtle of Chriſt, in the ſame circumſtances. You have heard the philoſopher's defence, that he worſhipped the gods of his country, and as his country worſhipped them. Hear now the Apoſtle: *Ye men of Athens*, ſays he, *I perceive that in all things ye are too ſuperſtitious: for as I paſſed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inſcription*, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worſhip, him declare I unto you: God that made the world, and all things therein. This God*, he tells them, *is not worſhipped with men's hands, as though he needeth any thing:— Nor was the godhead like unto gold, or ſilver, or ſtone, graven by art and man's device.* He then calls upon them, in the name of this great God, to repent of their ſuperſtition and idolatry, which God would no longer bear: *becauſe he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead.*

Which of theſe two now was a preacher of true religion? Let thoſe who value human reaſon at the higheſt rate determine the point.

The manner in which Socrates died was the calmeſt and the braveſt in the world, and excludes all pretence to ſay that he diſſembled his opinion and practice before his judges out of any fear, or meanneſs of ſpirit; vices with which he was never taxed, and of which he ſeems to have been incapable.

Conſider then, was it poſſible for any man, upon the authority of Socrates, to open his mouth againſt

the idolatry of the heathen world, or to make uſe of his name to that purpoſe, who had ſo ſolemnly, in the face of his country, and before the greateſt judicature of Greece, borne teſtimony to the gods of his country, and the worſhip paid them?

But to proceed: the city of Athens ſoon grew ſenſible of the injury done to the beſt and wiſeſt of their citizens, and of their own great miſtake in putting Socrates to death. His accuſers and his judges became infamous; and the people grew extravagant in doing honours to the memory of the innocent ſufferer: they erected a ſtatue, nay a temple, to his memory; and his name was had in honour and reverence. His doctrines upon the ſubjects of divinity and morality were introduced into the world with all the advantage that the ableſt and politeſt pens could give; and they became the ſtudy and entertainment of all the conſiderable men who lived after him. It is worth obſerving too, that from the death of Socrates to the birth of Chriſt were, if I remember right, near four hundred years; which was time ſufficient to make the experiment, how far the wiſdom of Socrates, attended with all the advantages before mentioned, could go in reforming the world. And what was the effect of all this? Can you name the place where religion was reformed? Can you name the man who was ſo far reformed, as to renounce the ſuperſtition of his country? No; none ſuch are to be found; and how ſhould there? ſince, the greater the credit and reputation of Socrates were, the more ſtrongly did they draw men to imitate his example, and to worſhip as their country worſhipped.

Conſider, on the other ſide, what was the conſequence of preaching the Goſpel. St. Paul entertained the Athenians with no fine ſpeculations; but he laid before them, in the plaineſt dreſs, the great and momentous truths of religion; he openly rebuked their idolatry, and condemned their ſuperſtition. The Goſpel was publiſhed in the ſame manner every where. The firſt preachers of it were enabled to ſupport it by miracles; and moſt of them ſhed their blood in defence of its truth. By theſe means they came likewiſe to have credit and authority in the world. But in theſe two caſes there was this great difference: the corrupt example of Socrates was a dead weight upon the purity of his doctrine, and tended to perpetuate ſuperſtition in the world: the authority and example of the Apoſtles went hand in hand, and united their force to root out idolatry. There was this farther difference too: the doctrines of Socrates could go only among the learned: the doctrines of the Goſpel were artleſs and plain, and ſuited to every man's capacity.

For near four hundred years the diſciples of Socrates had the world to themſelves, to reform it if they could; in all which time there is no evidence remaining that the religion of the world was the better for their wiſdom. But in much leſs time the Goſpel prevailed in moſt parts of the known world: wherever it came, ſuperſtition and idolatry fled before it: and in little more than three centuries the empire became Chriſtian; which completed the victory over the heathen deities. And, if we may judge by this compariſon between the wiſeſt of the

heathens and an apoſtle of Chriſt, the doctrine of the text will be fully verified; *that the world by wiſdom knew not God, and that God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching has provided ſalvation for them who believe.*

I have gone through the principal points which the text led me to conſider, and ſhall add but few words by way of reflection on the whole.

If then it appears from hiſtory, and the experience of the world before us, that men for ages together lived in ignorance of the true God, and of true religion, and that reaſon was not able to contend againſt inveterate errors and ſuperſtitions; let us not be ſo vain as to imagine that we could have done more in the ſame circumſtances, than all or any who lived in the many ages of idolatry. If we conſider to what height arts and ſciences were carried in thoſe days, and the politeneſs of Greece and Rome in all parts of learning, we ſhall have little reaſon to imagine that men have grown wiſer as the world has grown older. If we have more reaſon in matters of religion, and undoubtedly we have more, it ſhould lead us to conſider to whom we are indebted for the happy change, and to give praiſe to him who ſet the reaſon of mankind free from the chains under which it had been faſt bound for ages together by ſuperſtition and idolatry.

When we conſider the means made uſe of by God for reſtoring true religion in the world, and pretend to judge of the fitneſs of them to attain the end propoſed, we ſhould be aware of being miſled by the conceits of ſome who think themſelves wiſe enough to give directions in a matter of ſo great

moment. Some may imagine it might be better, if the Goſpel had reaſoned more philoſophically on the nature of the Deity, or more fully explained the nature of the human ſoul; and others may wiſh that other abſtruſe points of reaſon and divinity had been cleared to their ſatisfaction. But this was not the errand Chriſt came on: he came to teach true religion, and to teach it to all men; and therefore what was not fit for all was no part of his buſineſs. The Greeks ſought after wiſdom, and the Jews required a ſign: but the preachers of the Goſpel had no commiſſion to ſatisfy the curioſity of one or of the other; but to teach the doctrines of God in ſuch a manner, and to prove them by ſuch means, as might influence and affect as well the loweſt as the higheſt. If then the means made uſe of to introduce the Goſpel into the world were ſuch as were proper and neceſſary to ſubdue ancient errors and prejudices; if the truths taught by Chriſt are a proper foundation for all the duties of religion in which man can have any concern; if they are left to be ſupported in the world, and propagated from age to age, by methods which by experience have been found effectual, and which, human nature conſidered, muſt be effectual to preſerve the profeſſion of religion amongſt men: if, I ſay, we diſcover theſe marks in the Goſpel, we ſee enough to convince us that the Goſpel is the power of God and the wiſdom of God unto ſalvation; which is ſeeing all that we are concerned to look after, or have any pretence to expect from him who came to ſave and to redeem us.

Laſtly, ſince we have the experience of many ages

before us to ſhew us how unable human reaſon is to ſtruggle againſt the errors and follies of ſuperſtition, when once they have got poſſeſſion; ſince from our own experience we know how much reaſon is indebted to the light of the Goſpel; we ſhould be careful to preſerve this light, for fear of falling back again into the wretched ſtate from which we have been delivered, or into a worſe. Reaſon was once, what the light of the Goſpel is now, a ſufficient guide in religion: but, when men grew corrupt and vain in their imaginations, ſuperſtition and error prevailed over the world, and falſe religion led reaſon in triumph for ages together. As reaſon was ſubdued, the light of the Goſpel may be; and will be, when the ſame cauſes meet to work together: a conſideration that ſhould make men, who have any ſenſe of religion, think ſeriouſly of the treatment the Goſpel every day meets with. If we uſe it no better, it may ſoon leave us; and, when once we get rid of this fooliſhneſs of preaching, we know, by ſad experience, what is to be expected from the wiſdom of the world.

DISCOURSE V.

JOHN iii. 16.

God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life.

IN this paſſage of Scripture, and in many others, the redemption of the world by Chriſt Jeſus is aſcribed to the love and goodneſs of God towards mankind. Whatever other difficulties men may find in the Goſpel, one would ſuppoſe that it might be admitted to be, at leaſt, a good repreſentation of the divine mercy towards mankind, and fully to diſplay that tenderneſs and compaſſion to our weakneſſes and infirmities, which we all hope for, and with ſome reaſon expect to receive, from our great Creator, whoſe *mercy is over all his works.*

The caſe being ſo, who would expect to hear any objection againſt the Goſpel derived from the topics of divine mercy and goodneſs? Yet ſome there are, who think the mercy of the Goſpel to be imperfect, and that nature gives far better hopes to all her children. They conceive the infirmities of human nature to be unavoidable, and the mercy of God to be infinite; and from theſe conſiderations they raiſe hopes as unbounded as they conceive the

mercy to be. As they derive theſe ſtrong aſſurances from natural reaſon, they conceive all promiſes of mercy to be unneceſſary, and therefore to be ſuſpected; and the argument is worked up not only to be an objection againſt the Goſpel revelation, but againſt all revelations, either paſt or to come.

There is nothing of more conſequence to the credit and authority of revelation, than to reconcile it to the natural notions and the natural hopes and expectations of mankind; and indeed the promiſes of the Goſpel and the hopes of nature are founded on the ſame common principles. Aſk a Chriſtian, why did God redeem mankind by ſending his Son into the world? he muſt anſwer, becauſe men were ſinners, weak, and miſerable, and unable to reſcue themſelves from their wretched condition. Aſk him, what moved God to expreſs ſo much concern for ſuch worthleſs objects? he muſt reſolve it into the goodneſs, and tenderneſs, and paternal affection of God, with which he embraces all the ſons of men.

Aſk the Deiſt, upon what grounds he has hope and confidence towards God? he will reply, that he conceives it impoſſible for a beneficent being to be rigorous and ſevere towards the crimes and follies of ſuch weak, fooliſh, and impotent creatures, as men: that their iniquities, though againſt the light of nature, yet flow from a defect in the powers of nature; ſince it is no man's fault that he is not ſtronger, or wiſer, or better, than he was made to be: and therefore, though the light of reaſon renders him accountable for his actions, yet

ant of power to do what his reaſon approves, nake his defects excuſable in the ſight of his able Judge.

ou ſee how nearly natural religion and the Goſ- re allied in the foundation of their hopes and ctations. It is pity ſuch near friends, who have common intereſt, ſhould have any diſputes. liſputes there are.

ar be from us to weaken the hopes of nature. Goſpel is no enemy to theſe hopes; ſo far rwiſe, that all the hopes and expectations of re are ſo many preparations to the Goſpel of ſt, and lead us to embrace that mercy offered Chriſt, which nature ſo long and ſo earneſtly ſought after.

at the queſtion is, whether theſe natural hopes give us ſuch ſecurity of pardon, and of life and ortality, as will juſtify us in rejecting the light evelation? Now, whoever depends on the for- neſs of God, admits himſelf to be in a caſe that ts pardon; that is, admits himſelf to be a ſin-

This being the caſe of mankind in general, t be conſidered,

irſt, that natural religion could not be origi- y founded in the conſideration of man's being a er, and in the expectation of pardon.

econdly, that the hopes which we are able to a in our preſent circumſtances, are too weak imperfect to give us entire ſatisfaction.

Thirdly, that the coming of Chriſt has ſupplied e defects, and has perfected and completed the es of nature.

t muſt be allowed, that the original religion of

nature was agreeable to the original ſtate of nature: and conſequently, if natural religion is founded in the conſideration of man's ſin and weakneſs, it follows, that man was originally formed a ſinner and weak. But farther,

Suppoſing men made originally to be what we ſee they are, upon what grounds are we to hope for an alteration for the better? For, if it was conſiſtent with God's goodneſs to put men into this ſtate originally, how is it inconſiſtent with his goodneſs to continue that ſtate, which was at firſt his own appointment? He could no more act inconſiſtently with his goodneſs at the beginning of the world, than he can at the end of it. If reaſon therefore admits the preſent ſtate of the world to be of God's appointment, it muſt never afterwards pretend to entertain hopes of being delivered from it; and without ſuch hopes all religion is vain and uſeleſs.

It may be thought perhaps, that, ſuppoſing the preſent ſtate of things to be of God's appointment, we cannot be anſwerable for what we do; for why ſhould he blame us for doing the work he has appointed? Allow this reaſoning; yet no religion can be built on it; for it can go no farther than to ſay that we ought not to be puniſhed for our doings: it can never ſhew that we have any title to be put into a better ſtate: the utmoſt it can pretend to prove, is, that we are abſolutely unaccountable; and, if ſo, there is nothing we can do to leſs purpoſe, than to trouble our heads about religion.

Farther, if the laws of nature are the precepts of natural religion, as without all doubt they are, it

ows, that natural religion can be nothing elſe obedience to the laws of nature; and, con-ıently, the genuine hopes of natural religion ſt be founded in obedience. This muſt neceſ-ly be the caſe; for all laws are made to be obey-

No prince was ever ſo abſurd as to make laws ı this view, that his ſubjects might break them, he ſhew his goodneſs in pardoning their tranſ-ſions: and yet this muſt have been the ſcheme Providence, if natural religion was nothing elſe n the beginning but an expectation of pardon ſin.

econdly, let us take a view of our preſent ſtate, ıout inquiring whether any and what change happened to put us into this condition; and let onſider what may be expected from our preſent umſtances. Two things may be affirmed with ainty of the preſent condition of mankind: one hat they have a ſenſe of their obligation to obey laws of reaſon and nature; which is evident n the force of natural conſcience: the other is, very few do in any tolerable degree, and none ectly, pay this obedience.

et us examine then how religion will ſtand upon e circumſtances. It is impoſſible to found the es of religion on innocence and obedience; for lience is not paid. On the other hand, abſo-impunity cannot be claimed for all ſins; much can any degree of happineſs, either preſent or re, be claimed in behalf of offenders. The ut-t probability to which human reaſon can arrive is caſe, is, that, the goodneſs of God and the

weakneſs of man conſidered, God may favourably accept our endeavours, how imperfect ſoever our attainments may be. But is this reaſoning built on infallible principles? Can any certainty or ſecurity ariſe out of this? any that can give reſt or peace to the mind of man, ever inquiſitive after futurity? Will you promiſe impunity to offenders upon repentance? Impunity, mere impunity, is not the thing that nature ſeeks after: ſhe craves ſomething more. But can the argument from the divine mercy be carried farther? Is it not great mercy to pardon ſinners? Can you with decency deſire a reward for them? Our Saviour has told us, that, when we have done our beſt, we muſt ſtill own *that we are unprofitable ſervants:* and, if we reflect that all our natural powers are the gift of God, and, conſequently, our beſt ſervices are but a debt paid to the donor; if we conſider that in all we do there is no profit to the Moſt High, that his power and majeſty are not exalted by our ſervice, nor leſſened by our neglect; we ſhall find that our own reaſon teaches us the ſame leſſon, and that, when we confeſs ourſelves unprofitable ſervants, we give greater evidence of our underſtanding than of our humility. And, if this be truly the caſe, what are the claims of natural religion? are they not the claims of unprofitable ſervants? the claims of thoſe to whom nothing is due?

Thirdly, let us now take a view of the conditions and promiſes of the Goſpel, and ſee whether we have any reaſon to be offended at them. As to the laws which are made the conditions of our happi-

, they are not new impoſitions, but as old as
on itſelf, and the very ſame which natural reli-
ſtands bound to obey. Here then can be no
plaint, at leaſt no juſt one. So far then we are
e ſafe, that we can be no loſers by the Goſpel,
e it lays no new burden on us. In all other
ects our caſe is extremely altered for the better.
feel ourſelves eaſily tempted to do wrong, and
ble to pay the obedience we owe to righteouſ-
. Hopes therefore from our innocence we have
e, but are forced to have recourſe to the mercy
God. Now this mercy, which we hope for, the
pel offers us in the name of God. Have we
reaſon to ſuſpect the offer? or to reject that
mercy, when promiſed by God, which our
reaſon teaches us to expect at his hands?
we ſin, nature has no refuge but in repen-
e; and how far that will go, we know not: na-
has not, cannot teach us this knowledge. From
Goſpel we learn, that true repentance ſhall ne-
be in vain; ſhall not only protect us from pu-
ment, but ſhall alſo ſet open to us the doors of
and immortality. There you may view reli-
once more reſtored to its native hope of glory
life for evermore. You will be no longer
ged to wander in the mazes and intricacies of
an reaſon, and to ſpeculate upon the attri-
s of divine mercy and juſtice; the limits and
ndaries of which are not to be determined by
wit of man, and the contemplation of which
inds with terrors as well as hopes: but you
ſee the clear and immutable purpoſe of God to
ſalvation to all who, with penitent hearts, and

a firm reliance on his word, endeavour after righteouſneſs.

One would imagine the Goſpel ſhould eaſily find credit with men, when all its promiſes do ſo exactly tally and correſpond with the hopes of nature. Has nature any reaſon to complain of this? Is it an objection to the Goſpel, that it has confirmed all your hopes and expectations, that it has given you the ſecurity of God's promiſe to eſtabliſh the very wiſhes of your heart? You truſt, you ſay, that he who made you ſtill retains ſome love for you: to convince you that he does, *he has ſent his well-beloved Son into the world to ſave ſinners.* Though you offend, yet you hope on repentance to be forgiven: the Goſpel confirms this hope; the terms of it are more beneficial, and convey to true penitents not only hope, but a claim to pardon. But pardon only will not ſatisfy: there is ſtill ſomething farther that nature craves, ſomething which with unutterable groans ſhe pants after, even life and happineſs for evermore. She ſees all her children go down to the grave: all beyond the grave is to her one wide waſte, a land of doubt and uncertainty: when ſhe looks into it, ſhe has her hopes, and ſhe has her fears; and, agitated by the viciſſitude of theſe paſſions, ſhe finds no ground whereon to reſt her foot. How different is the ſcene which the Goſpel opens! There we ſee the heavenly Canaan, the new Jeruſalem; in which city of the great God there are manſions, many manſions, for receiving them, *who through faith, and patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory and immortality.* Our bleſſed Maſter has aboliſhed death, and re-

deemed us into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God, that we may dwell in his preſence as long as time itſelf ſhall laſt.

If we were to form a ſyſtem of religion for ourſelves that ſhould anſwer to all our wiſhes and deſires, what more could we aſk for ourſelves than what the Goſpel has offered? The obedience required of us is the ſame to which we are antecedently bound, in virtue of that reaſon and underſtanding which makes us to be men. The promiſes of the Goſpel extend to more than nature could ever claim; they take in all her wiſhes, eſtabliſh all her hopes; and they are offered by a hand that is able to make them good.

The concluſion of the whole is, that, ſince the religion of a ſinner muſt neceſſarily be founded in the hopes of mercy; ſince theſe hopes have at beſt but uncertain foundation in natural religion, and are liable to be diſturbed and ſhaken by frequent doubts and miſgivings of mind; we have great reaſon to bleſs and adore the goodneſs of God, who has openly diſplayed before our eyes the love that he has for the children of men, by ſending *his well-beloved Son into the world, that all who believe in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life.*

DISCOURSE VI.

2 TIMOTHY i. 10.

—And hath brought life and immortality to light through the Goſpel.

THESE words being ſpoken of our bleſſed Saviour, and affirming that he through the Goſpel brought life and immortality to light, are thought by ſome to be excluſive of all arguments for a future immortality, drawn either from the light of reaſon and nature, or from the writings of Moſes: for, if the hopes of immortality were ſo ſupported before the coming of Chriſt Jeſus, it could not be truly aſſerted of him, *that he brought life and immortality to light through the Goſpel.* And ſo far at leaſt they muſt be allowed to argue juſtly, that, if the text is to be underſtood in this excluſive ſenſe, it will affect the proofs and authorities of any former revelation equally with thoſe of ſenſe and reaſon. But then, on the other ſide, it is certain, that, if this argument does not impeach the authority of Moſes with regard to this fundamental article of faith, neither will it ſhut out the proofs of natural religion; ſince it muſt deſtroy the evidence of both, or of neither. Now, that it does not ſet aſide the authority of Moſes, is evident from our Saviour's argument to the Sadducees: *Now that the*

dead are raiſed, even Moſes ſhewed at the buſh, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob, Luke xx. 37. From whence it appears, that our Saviour thought the law of Moſes afforded good proof of a future life; which is inconſiſtent with the ſuppoſition that there was no evidence for life and immortality till the publication of the Goſpel.

But, ſuppoſing Moſes or the law of nature to afford evidence for a future life and immortality, it remains to be conſidered, in what ſenſe the words of the text are to be underſtood, which do affirm *that life and immortality were brought to light through the Goſpel.* To bring any thing to light may ſignify, according to the idiom of the Engliſh tongue, to diſcover or reveal a thing which was perfectly unknown before: but the word in the original is ſo far from countenancing, that it will hardly admit of this ſenſe. The Greek runs thus; φωτίσαντος δὲ ζωὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν. Now φωτίζειν ſignifies (not to bring to light, but) to enlighten, illuſtrate, or clear up any thing. You may judge by the uſe of the word in other places: it is uſed in John i. 9. *That was the true light, which lighteth* (or enlighteneth) *every man that cometh into the world*; ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον. Jeſus Chriſt did not by coming into the world bring men to light; but he did by the Goſpel enlighten men, and make thoſe, who were dark and ignorant before, wiſe even to ſalvation. In like manner our Lord did enlighten the doctrine of life and immortality, not by giving the firſt or only notice of it, but by clearing up the doubts and difficulties under which it laboured, and giving a better

evidence for the truth and certainty of it, than nature or any revelation before had done. There is one place more, where our tranſlators render the original word as they have done in the text: 1 Cor. iv. 5. *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkneſs, and will make manifeſt the counſels of the hearts; and then ſhall every man have praiſe of God.* But in this place it had been more properly rendered, *who will caſt light upon* the hidden things of darkneſs; and, ſo rendered, it better ſuits what follows, and *will make manifeſt* the counſels of the heart. The hidden things of darkneſs, which ſhall be brought to light at the coming of the Lord, are the actions and practices of wicked men; which, though they are of a certain and determinate nature, are yet hard to judge of, becauſe we cannot diſcern the ſprings and motives from whence they ariſe: perfectly unknown to us they are not; if they were, there was no occaſion for the Apoſtle to forbid us judging of them; for men do not, cannot judge at all of things which do not at all fall under their notice: but they are ſo dark and obſcure, that it is hard to judge rightly of them; and therefore it is but prudent to ſuſpend our ſentence till the day comes which will make all things clear, which will hold ſuch a light to theſe hidden things of darkneſs, that we ſhall manifeſtly diſcern them, and be able to view them on every ſide. So that, in this caſe, the hidden things of darkneſs are not ſuppoſed to be perfectly unknown, but only to be ſo dark and involved, that we cannot ſafely paſs our judgment on them; and *to bring them to light* im-

ports no more than to ſet them in a clear light, and to make them plain and manifeſt to the eyes of all the world. According to the uſe then of the original word, *to bring life and immortality to light* ſignifies to illuſtrate and make plain this great doctrine of religion, to diſpel the doubts and uncertainties in which it was involved, and to give evident proof and demonſtration to the world of the certainty of a future life and immortality.

The text, thus explained, leaves us at liberty to make the beſt both of the evidence of nature and of Moſes for a future life and immortality, and aſſerts nothing to the Goſpel but this prerogative, that it has given a ſurer and fuller proof of this fundamental article, than ever the world before was acquainted with. The true point then now before us, and which takes in the whole view of the text, is, to conſider the evidence which mankind had for the doctrine of immortality before the coming of Chriſt, and the evidence which the Goſpel now affords; and to ſhew where the former evidence failed, and how it is ſupplied by the latter.

It would take up too much time to examine minutely the ſeveral arguments for the immortality of the ſoul, which are to be found in the writings of heathen authors; nor would it perhaps anſwer the purpoſe of our preſent inquiry: for the natural evidence in this caſe is not ſo much to be eſtimated by the acuteneſs of this or that writer, as by the common ſenſe and apprehenſion of mankind: and this, and all other opinions which have any pretenſion to derive themſelves from nature, owe their authority, not to the abſtracted reaſonings of any ſchool,

t to ſome general ſenſe and notion which is found all men, or to ſome common and uncontroverted ıxim of reaſon. The unbelievers of this age have uſed their time and pains in their endeavours to poſe the natural evidence of immortality, by conıting the different ſentiments of the ancient phiophers, and by ſhewing their uncertainty and inıſiſtency: for what if Plato, if Ariſtotle, if Tully, : inconſiſtent with one another, or with themves, in their abſtracted arguings upon this point? hat is this to the evidence of nature, which is not : ſingle opinion of Plato, or any other philoſoer, but the united voice of all mankind? This s the common belief of the world, derived from ne common ſenſe, or principle of reaſon, before y philoſopher had ſo much as thought of an abacted reaſon for the proof of it: and, had not the mmon ſenſe of nature dictated this truth to them, am very confident the philoſophical reaſons had ver been thought of. That the common belief and rſuaſion was the foundation of the philoſophical quiry, is evident from hence, that all the ancient iters upon this ſubject appeal to the common noın and conſent of mankind, as one great argument r the truth of the doctrine: which certainly oves this at leaſt, that the world was poſſeſſed this belief long before they were writers, or er the philoſophical reaſons were thought of. If e notion was common, that alone is a ſufficient oof that it did not ariſe from abſtracted reaſong; for no common opinion ever did, or ever can: d the reaſon is plain; for a common opinion is at which is received by the generality of men,

who never were, who never will be, capable of attending to abſtracted reaſon. Now this natural evidence, diſtinguiſhed from the intricacies of philoſophy, is the thing which we inquire after, and which will ſtand its ground, whatever becomes of the private notions of learned men: for nature may be in the right in giving notice of a future life, however men may be miſtaken, when they come to conſider and aſcertain the nature and cauſe of it; which to do is the mark and aim of philoſophy.

But the common conſent is the voice and law of nature; for what all agree in muſt needs derive itſelf from ſomething that is common to all; and what is ſo, but the ſenſe and inſtinct of nature? When men come to ſpeculation, they differ as much in the caſt and turn of their minds, as they do in the features and lineaments of their faces; and therefore ſpeculative reaſoning will never produce a common perſuaſion.

This belief and perſuaſion of the certainty of a future life aroſe from the common ſenſe that men have of the difference of good and evil, and of every man's being accountable for the things done in this world; which account not being taken in this world, as the leaſt degree of obſervation will enable men to ſee, they concluded, or rather they felt from the very force of reaſon and conſcience, that there was an account to be given hereafter. Such an internal argument as this, which ſprings up in the heart and from the heart of every man, has a greater weight in it, than all the reaſonings of philoſophy put together, and will tie men down, if not to hope for, yet at leaſt to fear a future immortality; either

of which is the ſilent voice of nature teſtifying the reality of a life to come.

That this is the true foundation of the univerſal belief of a future life, may be learnt from hence, that the perſuaſion of another life was always connected with the ſuppoſition that there were different ſtates for good and bad men; ſo that you cannot any where trace the notion of immortality, but you find evidence alſo for the different conditions of men in another life, according as they have behaved themſelves in this. Now theſe two opinions being thus inſeparably united, it is eaſy to judge which is the natural ſenſe, and which the conſequence: let any man try, and he will find, that it is not the expectation of living, that makes men infer the reaſonableneſs or neceſſity of a judgment; but it is the reaſonable and natural expectation of judgment, which makes them infer the neceſſity and reality of a future life.

Into what great abſurdities this natural notion grew under the management of poets, is well known: they named the princes and the judges, and deſcribed the tortures of the wicked, as their fancies led them; and their inventions became the vulgar theology. But this ſtill ſhews the truth of what I have aſſerted; for neither would the poets, whoſe buſineſs it is to raiſe fine ſcenes upon the plan and probability of nature, have ſo painted the torments and the enjoyments of men departed, neither would the world have received their inventions, had there been no foundation in nature to ſupport the romance.

As to ſuch as imagine that the notion of a future

life aroſe from the deſcriptions and inventions of poets, they may e'en as well ſuppoſe that eating and drinking had the ſame original, and that men had never thought of it but for the fine feaſts and entertainments which are deſcribed in ſuch writers. The poets were the Papiſts of antiquity, who corrupted the genuine ſentiments of nature, and obſcured the light of reaſon, by introducing the wild conceits of folly and ſuperſtition: and, when once they had grafted the ſlips of ſuperſtition upon the ſtock of nature, they throve ſo faſt, and grew ſo rank, that the natural branches were even ſtarved by the luxuriancy of this wild olive. But ſtill the root was natural, though the fruit was wild. All that nature teaches is, that there is a future life, diſtinguiſhed into different ſtates of happineſs and miſery, in which men will be rewarded or puniſhed, according as they have purſued or neglected the rules of virtue and honour. And this notion prevailed where the fables of Greece had never been heard of; and wicked men felt in themſelves the fear of the wrath which is to come, though they had never ſo much as learnt the name of Tantalus or Siſyphus, or any other ſufferer in the poets' ſcene of hell.

The natural evidence then of life and immortality ſtands equally clear of the inventions of poetry, and the ſubtilties and refinements of philoſophy; and, though it be allied to both, yet it aroſe from neither. The truth of the caſe with regard to both is this: the poets found men in poſſeſſion of the doctrine of a future ſtate, with rewards and puniſhments for good and bad men: upon this foundation they went

to work; and the plain draught of nature was almoſt hid under the ſhades and colours with which they endeavoured to beautify and adorn it. The philoſophers found the ſame perſuaſion in themſelves and others, and, as their profeſſion led them, ſought out for phyſical reaſons to ſupport the cauſe. This inquiry has furniſhed us with the various opinions of antiquity concerning the nature and operation of the ſoul, its manner of acting in the body and out of it, its eternity and immortality, and many other curious pieces of learning. How far any or all of theſe inquirers into nature ſucceeded in their attempt to prove the immortality of the ſoul from phyſical cauſes, is another queſtion. As to the preſent point, it is plain the natural evidence is not concerned in their ſucceſs, whatever it is; for the natural evidence is prior to their inquiries, and ſtands upon another foot, upon the common ſenſe and apprehenſion of mankind: and the ſchools may determine the ſoul to be fire, or air, or harmony, or what elſe they pleaſe; yet ſtill nature will make every man feel that the grave will not ſecure him from appearing before the great tribunal, to which he is accountable.

So true is this, that, had it not been for philoſophy, there had remained perhaps no footſteps of any unbelievers in this great article: for the ſenſe of nature would have directed all right; but philoſophy miſguided many. For thoſe who denied immortality, did not deny the common ſenſe of nature, which they felt as well as others; but they rejected the notice, and thought it falſe, becauſe they could not find phyſical cauſes to ſupport the

belief, or thought that they found phyſical cauſes effectually to overthrow it. This account we owe to Cicero, one of the beſt judges of antiquity; who tells us plainly, that the reaſon why many rejected the belief of the immortality of the ſoul, was, becauſe they could not form a conception of an unbodied ſoul. So that infidelity is of no older a date than philoſophy; and a future ſtate was not doubted of, till men had puzzled and confounded themſelves in their ſearch after the phyſical reaſon of the ſoul's immortality. And now conſider how the caſe ſtands, and how far the evidence of nature is weakened by the authority of ſuch unbelievers. All mankind receive the belief of a future life, urged to it every day by what they feel tranſacted in their own breaſts: but ſome philoſophers reject this opinion, becauſe they have no conception of a ſoul diſtinct from the body; as if the immortality of the ſoul depended merely upon the ſtrength of human imagination. Were the natural evidence of immortality built upon any particular notion of an human ſoul, the evidence of nature might be overthrown by ſhewing the impoſſibility or improbability of ſuch notion: but the evidence of nature is not concerned in any notion; and all the common notions may be falſe, and yet the evidence of nature ſtand good, which only ſuppoſes man to be a rational creature, and, conſequently, accountable: and, if any philoſopher can prove the contrary, he may then, if his word will afterwards paſs for any thing, reject this and all other evidence whatever.

The natural evidence, I ſay, ſuppoſes only that a

man is a rational, accountable creature: and, this being the true foundation in nature for the belief of the immortality, the true notion of nature muſt needs be this; that man, as ſuch, ſhall live to account for his doings. The queſtion then, upon the foot of nature, is this, What conſtitutes the man? and whoever obſerves with any care, will find that this is the point upon which the learned of antiquity divided. The vulgar ſpoke of men after death juſt in the ſame manner as they did of men on earth: and Cicero obſerves, that the common error (as he calls it) ſo far prevailed, that they ſuppoſed ſuch things to be tranſacted *apud inferos, quæ ſine corporibus nec fieri poſſent, nec intelligi*; which could neither be done, nor conceived to be done, without bodies. The generality of men could not arrive to abſtracted notions of unbodied ſpirits: and, though they could not but think that the body, which was burnt before their eyes, was diſſipated and deſtroyed; yet ſo great was the force of nature, which was ever ſuggeſting to them that men ſhould live again, that they continued to imagine men with bodies in another life, having no other notion or conception of men.

But with the learned nothing was held to be more abſurd than to think of having bodies again in another ſtate: and yet they knew that the true foundation of immortality was laid in this point, that the ſame individuals ſhould continue. The natural conſequence then was from theſe principles to exclude the body from being any part of the man: and all, I believe, who aſſerted an immortality, agreed in this notion. The Platoniſts un-

doubtedly did; and Cicero has every where declared it to be his opinion: *Tu habeto*, ſays he, *te non eſſe mortalem, ſed corpus: nec enim is es quem forma iſta declarat; ſed mens cujuſque is eſt quiſque.* It is not you, but your body, which is mortal: for you are not what you appear to be; but it is the mind which is the man. This being the caſe, the controverſy was neceſſarily brought to turn upon the nature of the ſoul; and the belief of immortality either prevailed or ſunk, according as men conceived of the natural dignity and power of the ſoul. For this reaſon the corporealiſts rejected the opinion: for, ſince it was univerſally agreed among the learned that all that was corporeal of man died, they, who had no notion of any thing elſe, neceſſarily concluded that the whole man died.

From this view you may judge how the cauſe of immortality ſtood, and what difficulties attended it, upon the foot of natural religion. All men had a natural ſenſe and expectation of a future life. The difficulty was to account how the ſame individuals, which lived and died in this world, and one part of which evidently went to decay, ſhould live again in another world. The vulgar, who had no other notion of a man but what came in by their eyes, ſuppoſed that juſt ſuch men as lived in this world ſhould live in the next; overlooking the difficulties which lay in their way, whilſt they ran haſtily to embrace the ſentiments of nature. This advantage they had however, that their opinion preſerved the identity of individuals, and they conceived themſelves to be the very ſame with reſpect to the life to come, as they found themſelves to be in regard to the life

preſent. But then, had they been preſſed, they could not have ſtood the difficulties ariſing from the diſſolution of the body, the loſs of which, in their way of thinking, was the loſs of the individual.

The learned, who could not but ſee and feel this difficulty, to avoid it, ſhut out the body from being any part of the man, and made the ſoul alone to be the perfect individuum. This engaged them in endleſs diſputes upon the nature of the ſoul; and this grand article of natural religion by this means was made to hang by the ſlender threads of philoſophy; and the whole was entirely loſt, if their firſt poſition proved falſe, that the ſoul is the whole man: and it is an aſſertion which will not perhaps ſtand the examination. The maintainers of this opinion, though they ſuppoſed a ſenſitive as well as a rational ſoul in man, which was the ſeat of the paſſions, and, conſequently, the ſpring of all human actions; yet this ſenſitive ſoul they gave up to death as well as the body, and preſerved nothing but the pure intellectual mind. And yet it is ſomething ſurpriſing to think that a mere rational mind ſhould be the ſame individual with a man, who conſiſts of a rational mind, a ſenſitive ſoul, and a body. This carries no probability with it at firſt ſight, and reaſon cannot undertake much in its behalf.

But, whatever becomes of theſe ſpeculations, there is a farther difficulty, which can hardly be got over; which is, that this notion of immortality and future judgment can never ſerve the ends and purpoſes of religion, becauſe it is a notion which the generality of mankind can never arrive at. Go to

the villages, and tell the ploughmen, that, if they ſin, yet their bodies ſhall ſleep in peace; no material, no ſenſible fire ſhall ever reach them, but there is ſomething within them purely intellectual, which ſhall ſuffer to eternity; you will hardly find that they have enough of the intellectual to comprehend your meaning. Now natural religion is founded on the ſenſe of nature, that is, upon the common apprehenſions of mankind; and therefore abſtracted metaphyſical notions, beat out upon the anvil of the ſchools, can never ſupport natural religion, or make any part of it.

In this point then nature ſeems to be lame, and not able to ſupport the hopes of immortality which ſhe gives to all her children. The expectation of the vulgar, that they ſhall live again, and be juſt the ſame fleſh and blood which now they are, is juſtifiable upon no principles of reaſon or nature. What is there in the whole compaſs of beings which yields a ſimilitude of duſt and aſhes riſing up again into regular bodies, and to perpetual immortality? On the other ſide, that the intellectual ſoul ſhould be the whole man, how juſtifiable ſoever it may be in other reſpects, yet it is not the common ſenſe of nature, and therefore moſt certainly no part of natural religion.

But it may be worth inquiring how nature comes to be thus defective in this material point. Did not God intend men originally for religious creatures? and, if he did, is it not reaſonable to expect an original and conſiſtent ſcheme of religion? which yet in the point now before us ſeems to be wanting. The account of this we cannot learn from reaſon or

ture; but in the ſacred hiſtory the fact is cleared yond diſpute. The abſurdity upon the common tion of immortality ariſes from the diſſolution of e body at death; and the great difficulty upon e foot of nature is how to preſerve the individuals r judgment, which are evidently deſtroyed by ath. Now, if this death was really a breach upon e ſtate of nature, it is no wonder it ſhould be a fficulty in the religion of nature; for the religion nature was moſt certainly adapted to the ſtate of ture. And the wiſe man tells us, *that God made t death: for he created all things that they might ve their being; and the generations of the world re healthful; and there is no poiſon of deſtruction them; nor the kingdom of death upon earth; for hteouſneſs is immortal. But ungodly men with their rks and words called it to them.* If immortality is the condition of the creation, if death came in a ſurpriſe upon nature, no wonder if ſhe ſtands ute and aſtoniſhed at the fatal change, and ſeems ither willing to part with her hopes of immorlity, nor yet able to maintain them. Upon the an of nature the common notion of immortality is the true one: for take death out of the queſon, which is the only ſeparation of ſoul and body at we know any thing of, and there is no pretence r diſtinguiſhing between the man and the intelctual mind. The vulgar certainly retained the ue original notion of nature; but, when the orinal ſtate of nature was loſt, the notion grew abrd; and it could not be otherwiſe. God made an immortal, and gave him conſiſtent hopes and ars: man made himſelf mortal by ſin: muſt not

then thoſe hopes, which were conſiſtent hopes upon the foot of immortality, become very abſurd, when joined to a ſtate of mortality? And thus the coming in of death obſcured the hopes of immortality.

Laſtly, if we conſider how our Saviour has enlightened this doctrine, it will appear that he has removed the difficulty at which nature ſtumbled. As death was no part of the ſtate of nature, ſo the difficulties ariſing from it were not provided for in the religion of nature. To remove theſe was the proper work of revelation: theſe our Lord has effectually cleared by his Goſpel, and ſhewn us that the body may and ſhall be united to the ſpirit in the day of the Lord, ſo that the complete man ſhall ſtand before the great tribunal to receive a juſt recompence of reward for the things done in the body. This account is given in the words preceding thoſe of the text: *who hath aboliſhed death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Goſpel.* Now, if the aboliſhing of death was the bringing to light life and immortality, it is plain that the coming in of death was that which darkened nature in this great point of religion.

There are two things, as we learn from our Saviour's anſwer to the Sadducees, neceſſary to confirm us in the belief of a reſurrection to come; namely, the knowledge of the power of God, and of the will of God: *Do ye not therefore err,* ſays our Lord, *becauſe ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?* The Scriptures contain the revelation of the will of God; and therefore the words, I reckon, are to be underſtood as if he had ſaid,

Ye err, not knowing the will of God and the power of God. If we are ſatisfied in theſe two points, that God both can and will raiſe the dead, we ſhall want nothing to aſſure us of the certainty of a reſurrection. The power of God we may learn from reaſon and nature: for what ſhould make us doubt but that he, who at the firſt formed man out of duſt and aſhes into a living ſoul, ſhould be able to call him into life again out of the ſame ſtate? But the Goſpel has declared both his will and his power, which he confirmed in the raiſing his own Son from the grave; and better evidence we could not have for the poſſibility and certainty of a reſurrection. This evidence of the Goſpel has reinſtated nature in all her hopes, confirmed her right to immortality, and taught her to triumph over death and the grave, which ſeemed before to be unmoveable bars to all her expectations. This has reſtored religion, which had hardly one ſound foot to ſtand on, and made our faith and our reaſon conſiſtent, which were before at too great diſtance. Nature indeed taught us to hope for immortality; but it was in ſpite of ſenſe and experience, till the great Prince of our peace appeared, *who brought life and immortality to light through his Goſpel.*

DISCOURSE VII.

ROMANS iv. 25.

was delivered for our offences, and was raiſed again for our juſtification.

E manner of expreſſion here uſed is different what is generally to be met with in other parts e New Teſtament upon the like occaſion. we are told that Chriſt was *delivered* for our *s*, and *raiſed* for our *juſtification*; as if the re- n of our ſins was to be aſcribed peculiarly to aſſion, and our juſtification in the ſight of to the reſurrection of Chriſt: whereas in the er before this, ver. 25, the Apoſtle tells us in al, that God hath ſet forth Chriſt to be a pro- ion *through faith in his blood*; and in ch. v.), particularly and expreſsly, *that, being juſti- y his blood, we ſhall be ſaved from wrath through* and ver. 10, *that we are reconciled to God by ath of his Son.* In the twentieth of the Acts, poſtle, in his exhortation to the elders of the h, warns them *to feed the church of God, which h purchaſed with his own blood*, ver. 28. To the purpoſe both St. Peter and St. John ſpeak; the elling us, *that the blood of Jeſus Chriſt cleanſeth m all ſin*, 1 John i. 7; the other, that we have redeemed *with the precious blood of Chriſt, as of b without blemiſh and without ſpot*, 1 Pet. i. 19.

It is the conſtant tenor of Scripture, that atonement for the ſins of the world was made by our great High Prieſt upon the croſs; that his death was our redemption, and his blood the price paid for us. So that, when we conſider the redemption (which includes our juſtification) with reſpect to Chriſt, the author and finiſher of it, it muſt be aſcribed to his death and paſſion: but, as to ourſelves, our title and intereſt in this common ſalvation being grounded on faith, our juſtification, though purchaſed by the blood of Chriſt, muſt be appropriated to ourſelves through faith in that blood: for the ſame Apoſtle, who has told us that we are *juſtified freely through the redemption which is in Chriſt Jeſus*, hath likewiſe told us *that God hath ſet him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.* For this reaſon we are ſaid to be juſtified by faith; not that our faith is the purchaſe of juſtification, which we owe to the blood of Chriſt alone; but becauſe through faith we obtain the benefit of the redemption wrought by Chriſt Jeſus. Now, though the death of Chriſt was the reconciling of the world to God, yet the reſurrection of Chriſt is the great and ſolid foundation of our hope and faith in him, even of our faith in his blood, by which he made the propitiation for our ſins: and therefore, although Chriſt died for our offences, and by his precious blood made atonement for our ſins; yet, ſince our faith in his death, our hope in his blood, by which hope and faith we are juſtified, are built upon the truth and credit of his reſurrection, it is very properly ſaid, that *he roſe again for our juſtification:* for the death of Chriſt

would have been no juſtification to us, nor could we have had hope or faith in it, but for the power and glory of the reſurrection; which has wiped away the ſcandal and ignominy of the croſs, and made it a rational act of faith to hope for life and immortality from him, who himſelf once died upon the tree.

For the truth of this expoſition I appeal to St. Paul, who, 1 Cor. xv. 17, has told us, *that, if Chriſt be not riſen, our faith is vain; we are yet in our ſins.* So that faith in the death of Chriſt, not grounded on the aſſurance of his reſurrection, is a vain faith, and ſuch an one as cannot deliver us from our ſins. Nay, that the death of Chriſt could not have been a propitiation for ſin without his reſurrection, he expreſsly teaches in the next verſe, ſaying, that, *if Chriſt be not raiſed, then they alſo, which are fallen aſleep in Chriſt, are periſhed.*

The power of the reſurrection, together with the atonement for ſin made by the death of Chriſt, is very beautifully expreſſed by St. Paul, Rom. viii. 34: *Who is he that condemneth? It is Chriſt that died, yea rather that is riſen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who alſo maketh interceſſion for us.* The death of Chriſt freed us from condemnation; but then was our freedom made manifeſt, when he came from the grave in triumph, and led captivity captive; when he aſcended to the right hand of his Father to be our perpetual High Prieſt and Mediator: for, as the Apoſtle argues, *if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, ſhall we be ſaved by his life*; i. e. by his reſurrection to life and to glory.

This account, as it gives the true interpretation of the text, ſo likewiſe does it ſhew of what great moment the reſurrection of our Lord was, which was to be the baſis and ſupport of the whole Chriſtian inſtitution, and the ground of our hope and faith in him. That Chriſt died the death of a common malefactor, after a life ſpent in innocency, and a conſtant and laborious teaching of the great duties of religion and morality, was but common to him, and others before him, whom God had raiſed up to be ſhining lights of the world. Thus the prophets of old were perſecuted and deſtroyed by ſundry kinds of death: but in their blood there was no expiation for ſin: the blood of Abel and of the prophets ſpoke no ſuch language, but cried to God for vengeance againſt a cruel and a guilty world. Had Chriſt died like one of them, and been no more heard of, how ſhould we have believed that his death had atoned for all the reſt of the blood that had been ſpilt from the foundation of the world? or that the whole earth had obtained remiſſion of ſin from God by deſtroying one more, and him the greateſt of all the prophets, in the moſt cruel manner? But, when our Lord roſe from the grave, and brought back with him the pardon which he had ſealed with his own blood; when, inſtead of executing wrath upon his enemies, he ſent again the offer of peace and reconciliation, and took upon himſelf to be their Mediator and Interceſſor, as he had already been their Sacrifice; what room was there to doubt of the efficacy of his death, the efficacy of which was ſo undeniably confirmed by his reſurrection? or what reaſon to miſtruſt the ſalva-

tion he offered others, when, by ſaving himſelf from the power of death, he had given the fulleſt evidence how able he was to ſave others alſo? The moſt incredulous of his enemies deſired him only *to come down from the croſs, and they would believe him:* but how much better reaſon had they to believe him, when he came, not from the croſs, but from the grave, which was by much the ſurer hold, and from which before no mortal had ever eſcaped! How undeniable was this teſtimony of God's love to mankind, that, after the ill reception his Son had found among them, after all the cruel uſage he had experienced, and the ignominious death he had ſuffered, he yet ſent him once more from the grave to convince unbelievers, and to proclaim and confirm the pardon he had purchaſed for them!

His firſt coming was attended with a mean birth and narrow fortune, his education was ſuitable to his condition, and the greateſt part of his life ſpent in obſcurity: *he had no form or comelineſs that we ſhould deſire him; he was a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief:* and when he fell a victim to the malice and rage of the people, his beſt friends, the conſtant companions of his ſorrow, gave him over for loſt; *they eſteemed him ſtricken and ſmitten of God:* all their hopes died with him, and the remembrance of his miracles and mighty works was buried in the ſame tomb with himſelf; and nothing leſs was thought of, than that *this was he who ſhould redeem Iſrael from all his ſins.* But, when he came again from the boſom of the earth, having ſubdued the powers of darkneſs and of death, then was he declared to be the Son of God with power;

and the glory as of the only-begotten Son of God ſhone clearly through the veil of fleſh which had ſo long obſcured it. And from thenceforth our faith has ſtood, not in the words which the wiſdom or cunning of man teacheth, but in the power and demonſtration of the Spirit of life: and we can with aſſurance ſay, *We know in whom we have truſted*, expecting life and ſalvation from him alone, who is the Lord of life and glory. But, after all, if the reſurrection of Chriſt is the ſupport of all other articles of the Chriſtian faith, how is itſelf ſupported? To our common apprehenſion nothing more incredible than that a man dead and buried ſhould be reſtored to life again.

To go into the particulars of the evidence of this great event, recorded in Scripture and the oldeſt writers of the church, would open too large a field of diſcourſe at preſent: and indeed there are ſome objections which naturally ariſe in the minds of men, which ought previouſly to that inquiry to be removed; for the great difficulty at which men ſtick, does not ariſe ſo much from the nature of the evidence we propoſe, as from the nature of the thing itſelf. The preſumptions againſt the poſſibility of a reſurrection operate ſo ſtrongly in the minds of ſome, that they think it needleſs to inquire what evidence there is for it, being perſuaded that the thing itſelf is not capable of being ſupported by any evidence. This prejudice was a very early one; for the Apoſtle expoſtulates this caſe with King Agrippa, *Why ſhould it be thought a thing incredible with you that God ſhould raiſe the dead?*

Let us conſider the force of this expoſtulation,

d ſee whether it is ſtrong enough to encounter
: prejudice.

Now, nothing can be ſaid to be incredible, if
:re is a power in any perſon able to effect it; for,
there is ſuch a power, that power may bring into
iſtence that very thing which you doubt of; and
cannot be incredible that a thing ſhould exiſt,
ıich may poſſibly really exiſt. If we conſider
ly the ſtrength of children, it is incredible that
ey ſhould build caſtles; but, if we conſider the
ength and ability of men, it would be ridiculous
doubt whether they could, or no. So that the
edibility or incredibility of any thing depends on
ıowing whether there is, or is not, a power ade-
ıate to the undertaking. The reſurrection of the
ad is in truth a very ſtupendous work: but nei-
er you nor I am to undertake it: if it depended
ı us, it would be incredible indeed. It is the
ork of God, and of him only: and ſurely I have
med one of credit and power ſufficient to be
ıſted in this great affair. And this is St. Paul's
gument, Why ſhould it be thought incredible *that*
od ſhould raiſe the dead? Whoever therefore af-
ms that a reſurrection is in itſelf a thing incredi-
e, muſt affirm that it is incredible that God has
wer to raiſe the dead. And now conſider who it
that can conſiſtently with the common and al-
wed principles of reaſon and nature deny this
wer to God. No one certainly, who admits that
od made the world, can entertain this doubt:
r, if God has given us the life we now enjoy,
ıat ſhould hinder him from reſtoring life again,
ter this is loſt? Can there be more difficulty in

giving life the ſecond time, than there was at firſt? If there be any contradiction therefore in the notion of a reſurrection, there muſt be the very ſame in the notion of creation. And therefore natural religion is juſt as much concerned in this point as revelation: for, though the belief of the fact, that the dead ſhall be raiſed, depends on revelation; yet our belief that God has power to raiſe the dead depends not on revelation, but on the clear dictates of reaſon, of that reaſon by which we diſcover him to be our creator. And, if you doubt even of this his power of creation, you muſt bid adieu to all religion at once: for, if God created not the world, how are you at all related to him? If he did not make us, what right he has to govern us, or what pretence to our obedience, neither you from nature, nor we from revelation, can ever be ſatisfied.

The power of God being admitted to be equal to this work, the queſtion of the reſurrection of Chriſt comes to be a queſtion of fact: and, though I propoſe not to enter into the evidence of the fact, yet it may be proper to obſerve, that a reſurrection, conſidered as a fact, is a fact as capable of evidence as any whatever; it is an object of ſenſe, of every ſenſe by which we judge of the reality of things without us.

We are told, *that Chriſt died, and roſe again.* Of his death, I ſuppoſe, there is no great doubt: die he certainly did: and ſurely there could be no more difficulty to ſee and know that he was dead, than in knowing when others were dead, from Adam to this day. One would think, therefore, that thoſe about him, who ſaw him crucified and

buried, might be trusted when they report that he lied.

But he came to life again: very true; and it was very easy for those who conversed with him to know whether he was alive, or no. There was no more difficulty in judging of his being alive, than of judging, in any other case, whether those we converse with are alive, or no. His having been dead and buried could not possibly alter the case, or create any difficulty in judging whether he was really alive, or no. So that the resurrection, considered as a fact, was in every part of it an object of sense, and as capable of being well attested as any other object of sense whatever. Lay these things together, the promise of God to give us life eternal, his power to make good his word, the confirmation he has given us of our hope by the resurrection of Christ; and what is wanting to make the belief of this article a rational act of faith?

The promises of God have never borrowed help from moral probabilities. The promises to Abraham were not of this kind; so far otherwise, that it is said of him, that, *against hope, he believed in hope*; that is, he hoped, where, humanly speaking, there was no ground for hope. There was no probability that his seed, who was a stranger and pilgrim on earth, should inherit the land of Canaan, possessed by great and powerful nations.

The promise of a son to him, when he and his wife were both too far advanced in years to expect one in the ordinary course of nature, was contrary to experience and to natural probability. But what says the Apostle? *Abraham, not being weak in faith,*

conſidered not his own body, now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadneſs of Sarah's womb.—But he ſtaggered not at the promiſe of God,—being fully perſuaded that what he had promiſed he was able to perform. This reliance on the promiſes of God, againſt all the preſumptions of human experience and probability, was the very thing, as St. Paul tells us, that *was imputed to him for righteouſneſs.*

Compare now this caſe with the caſe of Chriſtians. We have great promiſes made to us by God in Chriſt Jeſus, the promiſes of a reſurrection to life. Inquire of the world; they know of no ſuch thing, the ages paſt have afforded no inſtance of this kind, and, as far as they can ſee and judge, daily experience is a witneſs againſt this hope. Under theſe difficulties, whither ſhall we go for refuge and ſupport? whither! but to the promiſes of God, and to this full perſuaſion, *that what he has promiſed he is able to perform.* If we hold faſt this perſuaſion, and ſtagger not through unbelief, then ſhall we indeed be the children of the faith of Abraham, whoſe *faith was imputed to him for righteouſneſs:* for, as St. Paul tells us, this teſtimony of Abraham's faith *was not written for his ſake alone, but for us alſo, to whom it ſhall be imputed, if we believe on him that raiſed up Jeſus our Lord from the dead.* Here then is the great article of Chriſtian faith, even of that faith which will be imputed to us for righteouſneſs: it is a firm confidence and reliance upon God, under this peculiar character, that he is the raiſer-up of the dead, and will, according to his promiſe, raiſe us to life eternal.

For the confirmation of this hope and faith God raiſed his own Son from the grave; who for that reaſon is ſaid to be raiſed for *our juſtification*, ſince upon the authority and credit of his reſurrection depends that great article of faith, by which alone we are to be juſtified.

As the bleſſed fruit of this faith is to all true believers life and immortality, ſo it highly concerns us to conſider what the event of unbelief muſt be. Many would perhaps content themſelves without the hopes of glory and future happineſs, if that was all. But that is not all: *for the dead ſhall be raiſed*, whether you like it, or like it not; *all who are in the grave ſhall come forth*, ſome to life, ſome to condemnation, according to the things done in the body. Nothing can ſecure to us more effectually an happy ſtate in futurity, than a conſtant and ſteady belief and expectation of the reſurrection of the dead. This will convince us that what we are now doing are not ſuch trifling things as to be ſoon forgotten, or attended with conſequences only for to-day or to-morrow; but they are things long to be remembered, things noted down in God's book, and will be expoſed to view at the great day in the preſence of men and of angels, and be attended with conſequences through all the ages of eternity, to our great honour and happineſs, or to our great confuſion and miſery.

DISCOURSE VIII.

ROMANS viii. 16.

The Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs with our ſpirit, that we are the children of God.

TO be the children of God is the greateſt privilege under the Goſpel, and, conſequently, implies in it all the advantages that belong to, and all the qualities neceſſary to make, a good Chriſtian. Thus our Apoſtle argues: *if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Chriſt.* As this is a new ſtate, which belongs not to us by nature, ſo our entrance into it is ſtyled a new birth; and we are ſaid *to be born again*, and *to be begotten again*, to theſe hopes: he, from whom we receive theſe hopes, is the Father that begets us, and his children we are: and therefore, as we receive our ſpiritual life from the gift and mercy of God, he is our father, and we are his children. Thus St. Peter tells us, *that we are born again, not of corruptible ſeed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*, 1 Pet. i. 23. This new life we receive by the miniſtration of the Spirit: the powers which belong to this life, and in which it conſiſts, depend upon the influences of the Spirit: and

therefore we are ſaid *to be born of the Spirit.* He is the earneſt of our inheritance, the pledge and ſecurity which we receive from God of our future immortality: our right of inheritance depends upon the relation we bear to God of ſons and children: and therefore the Spirit of adoption, by which we are born to God, is the pledge and ſecurity of our inheritance, as he is ſtyled by our Apoſtle.

But the difficulty is, how to make the firſt ſtep, and to know aſſuredly that we are the children of God. When once we are ſure of this, it will not be hard to believe that God will provide for his own children, and ſecure to them an inheritance that fadeth not away. And here the Apoſtle tells us, *that the Spirit itſelf*, that is, the ſame Spirit by which we are made children, *beareth witneſs with our ſpirit, that we are the children of God.* It is matter of great diſpute, what ſort of evidence the Apoſtle here means, and what kind of certainty ariſes from it. Some have placed this evidence among the gifts of the Spirit, and ſuppoſed it to be given on purpoſe to aſſure the elect of the certainty of their ſalvation. Others maintain, that no man, unleſs it be ſpecially revealed to him by God, can ever know that he is in a ſtate of ſecurity in this life: and this opinion was received and confirmed by the Council of Trent, as may be ſeen at large in the ſixth ſeſſion. It will not be worth my pains or your patience to enter into the niceties of this controverſy: and therefore I ſhall confine myſelf to St. Paul, and endeavour to ſhew you his meaning in the text, which will go a great way towards giving us right notions and apprehenſions in

his matter. In order to this, I propoſe three things o be conſidered:

Firſt, How many witneſſes St. Paul points out to us in the text, and who they are.

Secondly, What kind of evidence each of them gives in this caſe.

Thirdly, What the reſult of their evidence is, and with what kind of certainty we know *that we are he children of God.*

Firſt, We are to conſider how many witneſſes St. Paul points out to us in the text, and who they are. As our tranſlators have repreſented St. Paul's meaning, there is no room for diſpute concerning the number of the witneſſes, which are evidently two: *he Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs with our ſpirit:* the ſpirit itſelf, that is, the Spirit of adoption, which Chriſtians receive, is one witneſs; and our own ſpirit is the other witneſs. But the vulgar Latin, and ſeveral other tranſlators, render the words to his effect: *the Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs to our ſpirit.* According to this ſenſe, which is maintained by Grotius and Crellius, and ſome others, there is but one witneſs, the Spirit of adoption, who bears evidence to our ſpirit. But the words in the original evidently imply the ſenſe which our tranſlators follow: Αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν. Συμμαρτυρεῖν ſignifies to be a fellow-witneſs, or to witneſs the ſame thing that another does: and ſo the word conſtantly ſignifies in Scripture, and is never uſed but where there is a concurrent evidence of two witneſſes. We meet with the ſame word in Rom. ii. 15: *which ſhew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conſcience alſo bearing witneſs,*

and their thoughts the mean while accuſing or elſe excuſing one another. And to this place Grotius ſends us, to ſhew that the word is uſed of one ſingle witneſs only; as here the conſcience only is ſaid to bear witneſs. But a little attention will ſhew us in this place another witneſs: the Apoſtle proves from the evidence of conſcience, that the Gentiles had the work or matter of the law written in their hearts: the law teſtifies to men what is good, and what is evil: if conſcience teſtifies the ſame thing to be good and juſt which the law does, then conſcience proves the matter of the law to be written in the heart; if it teſtifies any thing elſe, ſo be it: but no other evidence will prove the Apoſtle's aſſertion, that the Gentiles have the work of the law written in their heart. And therefore the Apoſtle's argument ſtands thus: the Gentiles ſhew the work of the law to be written in their heart by the teſtimony of their conſcience, which agrees with the teſtimony of the law; their conſcience and the law both allowing and forbidding the ſame thing. So that the Apoſtle's argument plainly ſuppoſes the concurrent evidence of the law and of conſcience. And therefore even here the word συμμαρτυρεῖν points out two witneſſes to us. The ſame word is uſed by St. Paul in the firſt verſe of the ninth chapter of the Romans: *I ſay the truth in Chriſt, I lie not, my conſcience alſo bearing me witneſs,* συμμαρτυρούσης μοι. But here evidently are two witneſſes to the ſame thing. When a man does not ſpeak the truth, it is certain that he witneſſes one thing, and his conſcience witneſſes another, and are therefore two diſtinct witneſſes:

e they likewiſe when a man ſpeaks truth; for ſame evidence will not make two witneſſes to be witneſs. And therefore here alſo there are two eſſes; St. Paul, who witneſſed his affection to countrymen; and his conſcience, which wit-ed for his ſincerity. The word is uſed but once e in the New Teſtament, and that is in the laſt ter of the Revelations; and there it is uſed with ect to a teſtimony, in which Chriſt, and his el whom he ſent to the churches, and even St. n, were concerned. So that the word is every re uſed of the concurrent evidence of two or e witneſſes. And, this being the conſtant uſe he word, there can be no reaſon given why it ld not be taken in the ſame ſenſe here, and ren-d, *The Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs*, not *to*, but *h*, or *together with our ſpirit, that we are the chil-of God.* Here then are two witneſſes; and they are, is next to be conſidered.

Who the firſt Spirit is, muſt be learnt from what before. In the ſecond verſe of this chapter we of *the Spirit of life in Chriſt Jeſus, which hath e us free from the law of ſin and of death:* in the h verſe he is called *the Spirit of God and of iſt*; in the eleventh verſe, *the Spirit of him that d up Jeſus from the dead*; in the fifteenth verſe, *Spirit of adoption, by which we cry Abba, Father.* he verſe of the text reference is had to this Spi-*the Spirit itſelf*, that is, the Spirit which has le us free in Chriſt Jeſus, the Spirit by which we e received adoption, does itſelf bear witneſs with ſpirit, that we are the children of God. But queſtion then is, whether Spirit in all theſe

places be the name of a perſon, or whether it denotes only a quality and temper belonging to Chriſtians; ſo that the Spirit of Chriſt ſhall ſignify no more than the mind of Chriſt does in another place, *Let the ſame mind be in you which was in Chriſt Jeſus*; that is, the ſame temper and diſpoſition. This ſenſe Crellius maintains, and others after him; and thus he explains the text: our evangelical ſpirit, that is, as he explains himſelf in another place, our evangelical temper, is a ſufficient argument to our own minds that we are the children of God. I mean not to diſpute this point with Crellius, and his brethren, the Socinians; which would be to run into a great controverſy: but, ſince the Spirit of Chriſt may and does ſometimes ſignify both ways, I ſhall endeavour to point out to ſuch as have no private prejudices to be maintained, which ſenſe is here to be followed. Firſt then, this Spirit is the Spirit of life, by which we are made free; that is, by which we are regenerated in Chriſt Jeſus, and ſet at liberty from the heavy yoke of ſin, which the Apoſtle had been deſcribing in the foregoing chapter. Now, an evangelical temper is not the cauſe, but the conſequent of this freedom. The Spirit of God is the efficient cauſe; of whom we are ſaid, for that reaſon, to be born. Secondly, it is the Spirit of him who raiſed up Chriſt; that is, the Spirit by which he wrought that great wonder and miracle, as is evident by taking the whole eleventh verſe together: *If the Spirit of him who raiſed up Jeſus from the dead dwell in you, he that raiſed up Chriſt from the dead ſhall alſo quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* So that the Spirit of him who raiſed

Chriſt from the dead, is the Spirit *by which* he raiſed Chriſt from the dead; that is, the Holy Spirit, who is mighty in works and wonders. Laſtly, it is the Spirit of adoption, by which we are made ſons: the Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of which we are born in Chriſt; of which birth an evangelical temper is not the cauſe, but the effect. So that, by the whole tenor of the Apoſtle's arguing, it appears, that the Spirit which beareth witneſs with our ſpirit, is the Holy Spirit of God, which works together with our ſpirit to enable us to perform the juſt and holy will of God. As to the ſecond witneſs, our own ſpirit, I need not ſpend much time to tell you who it is, ſince moſt are agreed that it is our own mind. *Who knoweth the things of a man, ſave the ſpirit of a man which is in him?* that is, ſave his mind and conſcience. So then the faithful Chriſtian has two witneſſes of his being the Son of God; the Holy Spirit of God, and his own mind and conſcience.

Let us therefore, in the ſecond place, inquire, what evidence each of them gives in this caſe. In order to this, we muſt look back to the latter part of the foregoing chapter, to which this verſe of the text relates: for in all this eighth chapter there is not one word ſaid before of our own mind or ſpirit, nor the leaſt hint of any evidence that it gives of our being the children of God. Our crying Abba, Father, in the fifteenth verſe, is very improperly pitched upon by ſome as the evidence proceeding from our own mind; ſince it is ſaid expreſsly, that we cry Abba, Father, by the Spirit of adoption: ſo that our crying Abba, Father, is an evidence

coming not from our own minds, but from the Holy Spirit. The power to do good comes from the influence of the Holy Spirit; and therefore the good we do is ſuch an evidence of our being the ſons of God, as we ſtand obliged to the Spirit of God for: *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the ſons of God*, ver. 14. To be led by the Spirit, is *through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the fleſh*, ver. 13. So that our victory over the fleſh is the effect of our having the Holy Spirit to aſſiſt and ſtrengthen us, and is conſequently, as it is a great evidence and aſſurance to us of our being the children of God, the evidence of that Spirit from whom it proceeds; that is, not our own ſpirit, but the Spirit of God. So that the great privileges mentioned in this chapter, ſuch as being made free from the law of ſin and death, of walking not after the fleſh, but the Spirit, being ſuch as we receive from the Spirit of God, are therefore evidences of the Spirit for our regeneration.

But where then muſt we look for the evidence of our own ſpirit? ſince all the marks and ſigns of regeneration mentioned in this eighth chapter manifeſtly belong to the evidence of the Holy Spirit. This difficulty put the Greek commentators upon a very forced interpretation of this place; for, obſerving that all the ſigns of adoption mentioned by the Apoſtle proceeded from the power and working of the Holy Spirit, in effect they made the two witneſſes of the text but one. Thus Chryſoſtom by the Spirit itſelf underſtands the Holy Spirit; and by our ſpirit he underſtands the gift of the Holy Spirit within us: "What is this?" ſays he: "*the Spirit*

"*beareth witneſs with our ſpirit.*" To which he anſwers, "The Comforter beareth witneſs to the gift "beſtowed on us; for the voice, that is, of crying "Abba, Father, belongs not only to the gift or "grace, but likewiſe to the Spirit who beſtows the "grace." The gifts of the Spirit are ſometimes called by the name of Spirit. The gift of prophecy is ſtyled the ſpirit of prophecy. But I do not remember that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are ever ſtyled *our ſpirit* in ſacred writ. Beſides, as I obſerved before, this reduces the two witneſſes to one; for how does the Spirit bear witneſs but by the gifts and graces beſtowed on us? and, if ſo, then the evidence of the gift, and the evidence of the Spirit, are one and the ſame evidence.

Keeping therefore to the ſenſe already laid down, let us conſider what St. Paul had in his view when he penned the place now before us. Thoſe who are converſant in St. Paul's writings need not be told that they muſt not always ſearch for the connection within a verſe or two of what they read. The Apoſtle often looks back to what went before at ſome diſtance, and, after a long chain of conſequences, returns to his point without giving his reader notice. This might be made plain by inſtances, were it our buſineſs at preſent to examine the manner or way of St. Paul's writing. But as to the place before us: in the latter part of the ſeventh chapter St. Paul deſcribes the ſtate of an unregenerate Jew, or heathen; for what he ſays equally belongs to both. This he does in order to ſhew them the neceſſity of redemption through Chriſt, inaſmuch as neither the law of Moſes, nor

of nature, could free them from the power and dominion of ſin, nor, conſequently, from death, which ever follows cloſe at the heels of ſin. That this was the Apoſtle's intent, appears from the lamentation he makes over the ſtate of nature, and the remedy he immediately propoſes of faith through Chriſt: *O wretched man that I am, who ſhall deliver me from the body of this death! I thank God through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* And then, in this eighth chapter, he ſets forth the power of redemption, ſhewing, in every part, how it ſupplies the weakneſſes and infirmities both of the law and of nature. The unregenerate man *was brought into captivity to the law of ſin*, chap. vii. 23. *But the law of the Spirit of life in Chriſt Jeſus hath made us free from the law of ſin and of death*, ver. 2. In the unregenerate man *there dwelleth no good thing*, ver. 18: but in the Chriſtian *dwelleth the Spirit of Chriſt*, ver. 9. So that the Apoſtle's main deſign here is, I think, pretty evident. But, to clear the matter before us, we muſt more particularly examine what he ſays of the unregenerate man's condition. He deſcribes him as under the moſt wretched ſlavery, obeying ſin, with the greateſt reluctance to his own mind and reaſon: *that which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I*, ver. 15. His mind he allows to be uncorrupted, and to ſtand firm to the law of God, approving the things which are good; but then the luſts and appetites of the fleſh are too ſtrong for it, and force it into the obedience of the law of ſin, which it hates and condemns: *I find a law*, ſays he, *that, when I would do good, evil is preſent with me: for I*

delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I ſee another law in my members, warring againſt the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of ſin, which is in my members, ver. 21, 22, 23. See then the divided empire of ſin and reaſon: reaſon approves what is juſt and holy, conſents to and delights in the law of God; but ſin captivates and enthrals it, and makes the man the ſlave of ſin, though the admirer and approver of virtue. The upſhot of the whole matter is, as St. Paul in the laſt verſe expreſſes it, *With the mind*, or ſpirit, *I ſerve the law of God, but with the fleſh the law of ſin.* And now conſider what aſſiſtance this condition requires: the man's ſpirit is right and pure; it loves, it delights in, it approves the law of God; and, could he follow the dictates of his reaſon, and obey the law of God as well as love it, and practiſe holineſs as well as approve it, he would want no other evidence of his being the ſon and ſervant of God: *his ſervants ye are*, ſays the Apoſtle, *to whom ye obey.* The man who is taken captive, and carried into ſlavery, obeys by force his tyrant's law; but he loves his own country and king, and longs to come under the obedience of his natural prince again. As to his own mind, he knows whoſe ſubject he is, and would be; but outward neceſſity ſhews him that he is a ſlave by the conſtrained obedience he yields to the foreign law. Take off force, and the man's own inclinations will return him ſoon to his natural obedience. And this is not unlike the caſe St. Paul puts the unregenerate man in: he loves God and his law; but he obeys the tyrant, ſin. Deſtroy the power of ſin, and reaſon

will return him to the obedience of God, and ſoon ſhew whoſe true ſon and ſervant he is. So that the evidence of reaſon, even in the ſtate of nature, ſhews us that we are the ſervants and ſons of God: but power conſtrains us, luſt and appetite rule over us, and woful experience ſhews us that we are the ſlaves of ſin. Now, to complete this evidence of our minds, and to render it convincing to ourſelves and others, that we are indeed the children of God, what more is wanting, than to deſtroy the power of ſin, and to give us up to follow the dictates of reaſon in obeying the juſt laws and commands of God? For this is a complete evidence that any man is the ſon and ſervant of God, that he loves him, that he obeys him, and keeps his commandments. You ſee then what the evidence of our own ſpirit is: it loves and delights in the law of God, and is reſtleſs to obey the law it loves: *with the mind I ſerve the law of God, but with the fleſh the law of ſin:* which words I deſire you to bear in your memory, whilſt I ſet forth to you the evidence of the Spirit of God.

In the eighth chapter St. Paul tells us, that the redemption by Chriſt Jeſus has put an end to the wretched captivity we lived under: *the law of the Spirit of life in Chriſt Jeſus hath made me free from the law of ſin and death.* Law here ſignifies power; for power is a law to thoſe who live under it. Now then the power of the Spirit has deſtroyed the power of ſin. The power of ſin was oppoſite to the mind and reaſon of man; ſo that man, whilſt he lived under that power, was a ſlave. But the power of the Spirit is on reaſon's ſide, and works together with it; ſo that to be under this power is a ſtate of freedom

and liberty: and therefore it is juſtly ſaid, that the law of the Spirit of life hath made us free. The conſequence of our being under the power of the Spirit is, *that we walk not after the fleſh, but the Spirit*, ver. 4; *that we mind the things of the Spirit*, ver. 5; *that we mortify the deeds of the body*, ver. 13; *that we are the ſons of God*, ver. 14; *that we cry Abba, Father*, ver. 15. Theſe are the fruits of the Spirit. Now, to walk after the Spirit, and to do the deeds of the Spirit, is to walk according to our own mind and reaſon; for reaſon approved the things of God, and the things of the Spirit are the things of God. To cry Abba, Father, proceeds from a ſettled and undiſturbed mind, from filial duty and reverence. Children, who live in diſobedience to their parents, are not apt to meet them with theſe endearing expreſſions: but, when the child loves, and is under no rebukes of conſcience for miſbehaviour towards his parent, he meets him with theſe words of love and of confidence. This therefore we owe to the Spirit: for before, however our minds conſented to his laws, yet ſtill we were ſinners, and conſcience ſtood between us and our Father; ſo that we could not approach without fear and trembling, our minds ſtill repreſenting him to us rather as an injured Lord, than as a tender Father. But, ſince the power of the Spirit hath ſtilled the horrid conteſt that was in us between reaſon and ſin, and that we both love and obey him, we now no longer fear his preſence; but, like children longing for the return of a kind father, we run out to embrace him, with words of friendſhip and affection in our mouths, crying Abba, Father: and by this means, ſays St. Paul, *the Spirit*

itſelf beareth witneſs with our ſpirit, that we a children of God. With the mind, ſays the Apoſtl fore, *I ſerve the law of God:* and now, ſays h the Spirit you obey the ſame law; and the Spi God and your ſpirit agree to give you the ut aſſurance of being the children of God. You a longer in the ſad condition before deſcribed, mind leaning one way, and the fleſh another that you deſired to do one thing, but yet did contrary, and were always reſtleſs and uneaſy, rel ed within, and conſtrained without: for the Sp by which you are now ruled, conſents to your m and is bent to perform the ſame things which mind approves; from whence you may have greateſt confidence towards God: for what n perfect obedience can there be, than that to wh both outward and inward man conſent? or w plainer ſigns can you have of a good ſon and ſerv than to know that he loves the law of his father, obeys it? Love the law indeed you did before; obey it you could not: but now by the Spirit obey it, and have the greateſt ſatisfaction, both fi within and without, that you are the children God. This may ſuffice to ſhew the Apoſtle's me ing, and to explain the nature of the evidence wh each ſpirit gives.

We muſt now, in the laſt place, conſider, w the reſult of this evidence is, and with what k of certainty we may know that we are the child of God.

And firſt, you muſt take notice, that theſe t evidences ſtrengthen and ſupport each other, a muſt both meet to give us the aſſurance we expe

We muſt have the evidence of our own ſpirit that we do indeed love and approve the law of God; and we muſt have the evidence of the Spirit of God working in us by obedience: and, when we both love and obey the commands of God, we want nothing farther to aſſure us that we are the children of God; but, where either of theſe is wanting, the evidence of the other avails nothing. If you love and approve the command, but do not obey, you are ſelf-condemned, you are in your ſins; luſt has dominion over you, and not the Spirit of God. If you obey the law, and conform outwardly to it, but do not love and like it, you are an hypocrite, no ſervant of God, but of the world; and your outward compliance is fleſhly wiſdom, and not the work of the Spirit.

So then you have two ways of judging yourſelves, which muſt both concur; you have inward and outward ſigns of grace: the inward ſigns are a pure conſcience, a ſincere love for God and religion, and whatever tends to the glory and honour of your Maker: the outward ſigns are acts of obedience conformable to the inward purity and love of your mind. Theſe are fruits by which you may judge yourſelves. Our Saviour tells us, *that we may know men by their fruits*; much rather may we know ourſelves by our own fruits; eſpecially when we may know the ſtock too from whence they grow, the notions and workings of our own heart.

Hence it appears, that the evidence of the Spirit is not any ſecret inſpiration, or any aſſurance conveyed to the mind of the faithful; but it is the evidence of works, ſuch as by the Spirit we perform:

and therefore the only ſign of ſanctification is holineſs; and the only mark of grace is to obey from the heart the word of God: and therefore they err, not knowing the Scriptures, who from this or the like paſſages imagine, that the Spirit ever gives, or was ever deſigned to give, inward aſſurance or certainty to men of their final ſtate.

Hence likewiſe it is certain, that ſome go too far on the other ſide, by denying that any man may know himſelf to be in a ſtate of grace: for all the children of God are in a ſtate of grace; and the evidence of the Spirit of God and our own ſpirit may make us certain, where they concur, as they ought to do, that we are the children of God. *If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God:* which is St. John's rule, and comprehends both the evidences in the text; for our heart judges both of our inward and outward obedience: and therefore, where our hearts condemn us not, we have the evidence of both ſpirits, the end of which is confidence.

But, laſtly, this certainty does not extend to our future and final ſalvation: for to be in a ſtate of grace is to be heir of ſalvation: but an heir may be defeated, if by any after-act he incapacitates himſelf to inherit. In a word, a ſtate of grace may be loſt; he that is the child of God may ceaſe to be the child of God: and therefore being certain and confident that you are now in a ſtate of grace cannot make you certain of your ſalvation; but you muſt ſtill *work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling*. This we may learn from our Apoſtle's own arguing here: *The Spirit itſelf beareth witneſs with our*

ſpirit, that we are the children of God. The conſequence of this is, *if children, then heirs,* ver. 17. *But now are we heirs through hope,* he tells us in another place; and at the twenty-fourth verſe of this chapter, *we are ſaved by hope: but hope that is ſeen is not hope.* Certainty ſhuts out hope: and, ſince being children makes us only heirs through hope, it is plain, being certain that we are now the children of God can give us no abſolute certainty of our ſalvation: and therefore it is great preſumption to talk of ſecurity. Our certainty reaches to our preſent condition, which is enough to keep our minds eaſy and contented. Other certainty than this might make us remiſs: this may encourage us *to run with patience the race that is before us, and to labour in the Lord, knowing that our labour ſhall not be in vain.*

DISCOURSE IX.

JOHN xx. 30, 31.

And many other ſigns truly did Jeſus in the preſence of his diſciples, which are not written in this book. But theſe are written, that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

THESE words ſtand towards the cloſe of St. John's Goſpel, and are by ſome thought to be the laſt of his own writing. They give us an account of the nature of his Goſpel, and of his end and deſign in publiſhing it to the world. The Apoſtle does not pretend his Goſpel to be a perfect and complete narrative of all that our Lord did whilſt he converſed among men, not even of all the miracles and wonders which he wrought in confirmation of his doctrine: *Many other ſigns truly did Jeſus,—which are not written in this book.* He adds farther, that the ſigns omitted in his account were done *in the preſence of his diſciples*, and were, conſequently, of as good authority as thoſe related by himſelf. This was but a neceſſary piece of caution; for St. John wrote his Goſpel late, towards the end of his life, after the Apoſtles and diſciples of Chriſt had ſpread the Goſpel far and near, and had both by

preaching and writing publiſhed the great works and ſigns done by their Maſter. To prevent therefore the ſuſpicions which ſome might be apt to entertain of their teachers, when they found the great evidences inſiſted on by them not mentioned by St. John, who, being the laſt writer of the Apoſtles, would naturally, for that reaſon, be ſuppoſed to be the moſt accurate; he declares that he had not recounted all the ſigns done by Jeſus, but that there were many others, which, having been wrought in the preſence of the diſciples, might very well be taught and publiſhed by them, though omitted by himſelf.

But why does St. John, ſpeaking of the miracles of Jeſus, take notice only that *they were done in the preſence of the diſciples?* whereas in truth they were done in the face of the ſun, in the moſt open and public manner, in the ſight of friends and foes; which is ſo advantageous a circumſtance, and which adds ſo much to the credibility of the ſigns, that it ought ever to be remembered. St. John knew this very well, having in the courſe of his Goſpel often taken notice of this very thing: particularly in the ſtory of Lazarus he tells us, *that many Jews were with Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother,* who followed Jeſus to the grave, and ſaw Lazarus come forth to life upon his call: *many of which,* ſays St. John, ch. xi. 45, 46. *having ſeen the things which Jeſus did, believed on him: but ſome of them went their ways to the Phariſees, and told them what things Jeſus had done.* But the reaſon why this is not inſiſted on in the text is, that it was not to St. John's purpoſe: he is there ſpeaking of the au-

thoritative promulgation of the Goſpel, as is evident from the laſt verſe, *Theſe things are written that ye might believe:* and this led him no farther than to obſerve that the preachers and publiſhers of the Goſpel were eye-witneſſes of the things they atteſted, and therefore unexceptionable witneſſes. This is the true foundation of the Apoſtles' authority conſidered as promulgers of Chriſtianity; which depended upon what they themſelves had ſeen or heard, and not upon what others had ſeen or heard, whether friends or foes. Other circumſtances may be good collateral evidence; but the teſtimony of the Apoſtles reſts upon this, that they themſelves ſaw and heard what they have reported. And therefore the ſame Apoſtle in his firſt Epiſtle ſets forth this evidence in the very ſame manner: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have ſeen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life—that which we have ſeen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye alſo may have fellowſhip with us.*

You have alſo the reaſon aſſigned which moved St. John to publiſh his Goſpel, which extends likewiſe to all the other writings of the New Teſtament: *But theſe are written, that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.* This reaſon is not ſo ſtrictly to be urged, as if writing were the only way of publiſhing the Goſpel, which we know was effectually publiſhed to great multitudes, before any book of the New Teſtament was written, by the preaching and working of the Apoſtles. But thus far perhaps we may juſtly argue, that writing is the

beſt, if not the only method of perpetuating the teſtimony, and delivering down the doctrines of Chriſt uncorrupted to diſtant ages: and this way has had the conſent and approbation of all civilized nations; from whence it is that *ſcripta lex* is uſed in the beſt writers to ſignify an inſtituted law, as diſtinguiſhed from the law of nature ariſing either from inſtinct or reaſon.

The Goſpels then were publiſhed that they might be a ſtanding evidence to all ages of God's purpoſe to redeem the world by ſending his Son to take our nature on him, *that he might die for our ſins, and riſe again for our juſtification:* and it was abſolutely neceſſary to convey this knowledge to the world by a proper authority; for revelation cannot obtain the force and authority of law, or any way oblige the conſciences of men, till it be ſufficiently publiſhed and declared. This is univerſally true of all laws whatever, both human and divine: and the reaſon of it is plain; becauſe otherwiſe men would be bound to an impoſſibility, to obey a law before they knew what the law was. For the ſame reaſon alſo it muſt be allowed, that the promulgation of the law is the proper care and concern of the lawgiver: for the law muſt come from the governor to the governed; and the ſubject, till he knows the law, that is, till it is promulged and ſufficiently declared to him, can have no concern in it. Apply this to revelation, and you will perceive, that it is abſurd to ſuppoſe that God has given any law to the world which he has not ſufficiently promulged and declared; for that would be to ſuppoſe that God intended to give, and not to give, a law to mankind at the ſame time. An

inſufficient promulgation is no promulgation; and therefore all powers and qualities neceſſary to give credit and authority to the publiſhers of a revelation are always ſuppoſed, when we ſpeak of the truth and authority of revelation. God may reveal what he ſees fit to one or two or more men; but, unleſs ſuch men are commiſſioned and duly qualified to ſatisfy others that ſuch things have been made known to them, others are no more concerned in the revelation, than if it had never been made. It would take up too much of your time to inquire particularly what are the neceſſary qualifications to conſtitute a proper witneſs to revelation. It may ſuffice to obſerve, that no man is naturally qualified for it, for this plain reaſon, becauſe all natural qualifications are eaſily counterfeited to ſerve a purpoſe. Honeſty, ſincerity, and religion may be put on in appearance; and a man may bear himſelf ſo well in the diſguiſe, as not to be diſcovered. Things in common life are eaſily believed upon the report of honeſt men: but then it muſt be conſidered, that the moral probability of ſuch things goes a great way in rendering them credible. It is no ſhock to our minds to believe that ſuch a thing happened at ſuch a time, which we know often does happen in the courſe of things, and probably might happen then. In ſuch caſes a ſmall weight inclines the mind to aſſent: but it requires other kind of evidence to make the mind ſubmit to the belief of things which are ſupported by no moral probability, but are quite out of the ordinary courſe and nature of things. This ſhews that no revelation can be ſufficiently promulged and declared to the world by men, unleſs they

are extraordinarily qualified and commiſſioned to that purpoſe. We do not therefore rely merely upon the honeſty or moral character of the firſt preachers of the Goſpel, but on their authority proved and ſupported by many wonderful works which God enabled them to do, and on their integrity ſufficiently eſtabliſhed by what they did and ſuffered for the ſake of the Goſpel.

But here the queſtion is aſked, How ſhall we diſtinguiſh between the pretences to revelation, which are ſo many and various, all of which have an equal right to be heard, that it is endleſs to look for religion in ſuch a crowd of pretenders to it, and difficult to determine the merit of the ſeveral claims? So that the only ſure way is to take up with natural religion, which is every where uniformly the ſame, and in which there is no danger of being deluded and miſled by impoſture; for natural religion admits of no counterfeit: and, ſince every man's reaſon is judge in this caſe, no man can be cheated but by himſelf: and all men are ſo much their own friends, that in a matter of ſo great moment, which ſo nearly concerns their preſent and their future happineſs, they may ſecurely truſt themſelves.

Now, to form a true judgment upon this caſe, it will be neceſſary firſt to ſtate the queſtion right upon the foot of this objection, and then to examine what weight of reaſon there is in it.

Firſt then, the queſtion muſt relate to revelation, conſidered only as the rule and meaſure of religion: for the diſpute between nature and revelation is confined to this one point, Which is the beſt and ſafeſt guide in religion? It is abſurd therefore to

bring inſtances of any revelations in this caſe, which do not pretend to this property, that were never given, or pretended to be given, as a rule of religion: for, when men talk of the various revelations that have been in the world, and the difficulty of determining which they ought to obey, they cannot take into their conſideration the anſwer of the oracle to Crœſus, or the ſeveral other anſwers on particular occaſions recorded in the Greek and Roman hiſtories, nor yet the particular meſſages which God ſent by the hands of different prophets to the people of Iſrael; for theſe revelations, whether true or falſe, being confined to particular occaſions, are out of the preſent queſtion, and have no relation to the inquiry concerning a rule or meaſure of religion. This obſervation will in a great meaſure overthrow the truth of the fact upon which the objection is built; for upon this view there are not many revelations that can come into competition: in the heathen world I know of none; for, though there were ſundry pretences to revelation, yet none was ſet up as a common ſtandard for the religion of mankind. The religion of Rome was chiefly introduced by Numa, who pretended a revelation for the foundation of his authority: but it is plain he aimed at nothing farther than modelling the religion of his city, and had no thought of the reſt of the world in what he did. Nor had the Romans any ſenſe that their religion concerned any but themſelves: and therefore, when they extended their conqueſts, religion was their leaſt concern; they left the world in that reſpect as they found it, and men were not ſo much as invited to take their reli-

gion. Now it is evident, that no law, either human or divine, extends farther than the lawgiver intends. Suppoſe then, if you pleaſe, Numa's religion to be a revelation; yet, ſince it was given and declared only to the people of Rome, the reſt of the world can have no concern in it. That no ſyſtem of religion in the heathen world claimed as a general law, is evident from the anſwer returned by the oracle, when the inquiry was, Which religion was beſt? The anſwer was, that every man ſhould worſhip according to the cuſtom of the country where he was. So that all religions were eſteemed equally good, and the moſt any religion pretended to was a local authority, which reached no farther than the laws of the country did: and, unleſs men are for giving more to the pretended heathen revelations, than ever they claimed for themſelves, or was claimed for them by thoſe who introduced them and lived under them, they cannot be brought into this queſtion, ſince they have no relation to us, any more than the many civil laws and conſtitutions of the ſame countries had: and men may as reaſonably complain of the great variety of civil and municipal laws that diſtract their obedience, and then inſtance in the laws of the Medes and Perſians, as they now complain of the variety of revelations, inſtancing in ſuch as, if they were true, concern them as little as the laws of Perſia do.

But perhaps it will be ſaid, that though theſe religions do not oblige us, yet nevertheleſs, if any of them were true, they effectually overthrow all others; for God cannot contradict himſelf, whether he ſpeaks to one nation, or to all the world:

and upon this foot theſe ſeveral pretences come within our inquiry. This reaſoning may be good; but then it does moſt effectually exclude all theſe pretences: for the voice of nature is the voice of God, and therefore cannot be contradicted by God. No revelation therefore can entitle itſelf to be conſidered, if it contradicts any one plain principle of natural religion: and there is not any one form of religion within the period mentioned that does not ſplit upon this rock; and therefore there is no danger of your being oppreſſed with labour and ſtudy in examining their ſeveral claims.

But farther; Which of them all ſo much as pretends to the eſſentials neceſſary to conſtitute a law, either human or divine? Where was it publiſhed and declared? by whom, and how qualified? Can you name the perſons, or produce the Goſpel of ſuch religion? Take the inſtance of Rome: What was Numa? a king, and therefore ſubmitted to in the innovations of religion. But what one mark of a divine commiſſion can you produce? and yet without ſuch marks even a true revelation could be of no authority. Try all other inſtances, and you will ſtill ſee how weakly the objection againſt revelation is ſupported by any pretences of the heathen world.

But ſtill it will be urged, that the many pretences to inſpiration, which have been received and admitted, are ſo many inſtances of the weakneſs of men, and their inability to diſtinguiſh between true and falſe in the preſent caſe. And how can we ever truſt ourſelves in examining revelation, and be ſecure in our judgment, when we ſee all the world

has erred before us, and men wiſe as ourſelves, who thought too, it may be, that they acted as rationally as we do, miſtaken in every inſtance of this kind? Is it not eaſily ſuppoſed, that the world is miſled now, as formerly it has been? Why then ſhould we expoſe ourſelves to almoſt certain error by following the ſame ſteps, and purſue thoſe principles which have never yet produced aught but deceit and falſehood? Whatever force there is in this argument, it muſt recoil upon the cauſe of natural religion; for certain it is from the hiſtory of all ages, both paſt and preſent, that men have erred groſsly and univerſally in many principal points of natural religion. How then ſhall we ever truſt ourſelves in examining the dictates of nature, ſince the attempt has in all ages produced folly, ignorance, and ſuperſtition? What ſecurity have we that we ſhall not follow our forefathers in all their errors and miſtakes, if we guide ourſelves by the ſame clue of thread which directed them? Nay, in truth, the errors and ſuperſtitions of the heathen world, even thoſe which pretended to derive themſelves from oracles and revelations of the gods, are chargeable upon this blindneſs and ignorance of nature. Had nature but done her part, men could not have been impoſed on by ſuch groſs and palpable ſuperſtition: had the natural notion of the Deity been preſerved entire and uncorrupted, no one form of the heathen worſhip could have ſtood before it; but they muſt have all diſperſed, as the clouds fleet away before the ſun.

What is it now that diſcovers to you theſe impoſtures, which were not ſeen by thoſe before you? Is

it not manifeſtly that true ſenſe of reaſon and nature, which hath been new kindled and lighted up in the mind of man by the Goſpel of Chriſt? Was it not then the want of this ſenſe that darkened the old world? But, be the cauſe what it will, if you judge rightly in ſuppoſing yourſelf able now to diſcern the dictates of reaſon and nature, without which you ought not to pretend even to natural religion, it is abſurd to pretend that you are in the ſame danger of being deceived by pretended revelations as the old world was, ſince you have, and claim to have, that light, the want of which was the very thing that expoſed them to all their errors and ſuperſtitions. And, to ſhew that this objection is a mere feint, aſk any one who makes it, whether he thinks any man could impoſe one of the heathen forms of worſhip, or any thing like it, on him? No man, I believe, but would be angry to be ſuſpected of ſo much weakneſs. Yet theſe very forms were impoſed on your forefathers; and you are confident, and with good reaſon, that they cannot be impoſed on you. It is evident then, that you are not in the ſame caſe with them, that their danger is not your danger; and, conſequently, their errors about revelation is no objection againſt hearkening to revelation now, when we know ourſelves effectually ſecured againſt their errors.

From theſe pretences let us turn to view the true revelations belonging to the ſame period, and ſee how far they relate to the preſent caſe. Thoſe given to particular men upon particular occaſions are out of the queſtion, for reaſons already mentioned.

The law of Moſes was publiſhed and declared with great ſolemnity, and by perſons every way qualified: it contains a rule or ſyſtem of religion, and is ſtill maintained by its diſciples in oppoſition to the Goſpel. Here then perhaps may ſeem to be ſome difficulty, when two revelations, that have equal pleas to truth, are ſet in competition one againſt the other. This queſtion muſt be argued upon different principles with Jews, and with other men: for the law was given and declared to the Jews, and they were under the obligations of it: they therefore are concerned to inquire, not only of the truth of a ſubſequent revelation, but alſo whether it does ſufficiently abrogate their law, or whether it is to ſubſiſt with it; as likewiſe whether their law has any where precluded them from admitting any farther revelations. But to us the queſtion is, how we are concerned with the law, and whether there can be any competition with reſpect to us between the law and the goſpel. From the principles already mentioned we may ſoon determine this queſtion: for it is plain, that no revelation can oblige thoſe to whom it is not given; that promulgation is ſo far of the eſſence of the law, that no man in reaſon or equity owes any obligation to a law till it is made known to him; that the obligations therefore of a law are limited by the terms of the promulgation. Apply this to the law of Moſes; you will find that law in the very promulgation of it confined to the people of Iſrael: *Hear, O Iſrael!* is the introduction to the promulgation; which it could not have been, had the law been deſigned for the whole world. And this was known

to be the caſe under the law. Moſes, who beſt underſtood the extent of his own commiſſion, ſays thus to the people of Iſrael: *What nation is there ſo great, that hath ſtatutes and judgments ſo righteous as all this law, which I ſet before you this day?* Deut. iv. 8. The holy Pſalmiſt expreſſes the ſame ſenſe in theſe words: *He ſheweth his word unto Jacob, his ſtatutes and his judgments unto Iſrael. He hath not dealt ſo with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them.* Pſal. cxlvii. 19, 20. From all which it is evident, that the law of Moſes has no claim to our obedience. The moral part of the law, when underſtood, will oblige every rational creature; but this is not the obligation we are now ſpeaking of. The law of Moſes then cannot add to the number of revelations which create us any difficulty in determining ourſelves: for, let the caſe happen as it will, we are free from the law. But the law affords even to us abundant evidence for the truth of the Goſpel. The proofs from prophecy are as convincing to us as to the Jews: for it matters not whether we are under the law, or not under the law, ſince conviction in this caſe ariſes from another and different principle. But I haſten to a concluſion.

Let us then conſider briefly, what alteration has happened ſince the coming of Chriſt to diſturb and unſettle our judgments in this great affair. A man perhaps, who is a great reader, may be able to produce many inſtances of impoſtors ſince that time, and imagine that they are all ſo many dead weights upon the cauſe of revelation: but what is become of them, and their doctrine? they are vaniſhed, and

their place is not to be found. What pretence is there then to ſet up theſe revelations? Is God grown ſo weak and impotent, that we may ſuppoſe theſe to be his revelations, and intended for the uſe of the world, had he not been baffled at firſt ſetting out? If God intends a law for the uſe of the world, he is obliged, if I may uſe the expreſſion, to publiſh the law to the world: and therefore want of ſuch publication evidently ſhews that God was not concerned in them, or at leaſt did not intend that we ſhould be concerned in them: and therefore it is abſurd to inſtance in ſuch pretences as difficulties in our way, which in truth are not in our way at all.

And thus the caſe of revelation ſtood, and the Goſpel had no competitor, till the great and ſucceſsful impoſtor Mahomet aroſe: he indeed pretends a commiſſion to all the world, and found means ſufficiently to publiſh his pretences: he aſſerts his authority upon the ſtrength of revelation, and endeavours to transfer the advantages of the Goſpel evidence to himſelf, having that pattern before him to copy after: and, ſhould we ſay that the Alcoran was never promulged to us by perſons duly commiſſioned, it may be anſwered perhaps, that the Alcoran is as well publiſhed to us as the Goſpel is to them; which has ſome appearance of an anſwer, though the fact is indeed otherwiſe; for even the Alcoran owns Jeſus for a true prophet.

But with reſpect to this inſtance, I perſuade myſelf it can be no very diſtracting ſtudy to find reaſons to determine our choice. Go to your natural religion: lay before her Mahomet and his diſciples

arrayed in armour and in blood, riding in triumph over the ſpoils of thouſands and tens of thouſands, who fell by his victorious ſword: ſhew her the cities which he ſet in flames, the countries which he ravaged and deſtroyed, and the miſerable diſtreſs of all the inhabitants of the earth. When ſhe has viewed him in this ſcene, carry her into his retirements: ſhew her the prophet's chamber, his concubines and wives; let her ſee his adultery, and hear him allege revelation and his divine commiſſion to juſtify his luſt and his oppreſſion. When ſhe is tired with this proſpect, then ſhew her the bleſſed Jeſus, humble and meek, doing good to all the ſons of men, patiently inſtructing both the ignorant and the perverſe. Let her ſee him in his moſt retired privacies; let her follow him to the mount, and hear his devotions and ſupplications to God. Carry her to his table to view his poor fare, and hear his heavenly diſcourſe. Let her ſee him injured, but not provoked: let her attend him to the tribunal, and conſider the patience with which he endured the ſcoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his croſs; and let her view him in the agony of death, and hear his laſt prayer for his perſecutors: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*

When natural religion has viewed both, aſk, Which is the prophet of God? But her anſwer we have already had; when ſhe ſaw part of this ſcene through the eyes of the centurion who attended at the croſs; by him ſhe ſpoke and ſaid, *Truly this man was the Son of God.*

DISCOURSE X.

ACTS ii. 22.

Jeſus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and ſigns, which God did, by him, in the midſt of you, as ye yourſelves alſo know.

THE great evidence of Chriſtianity, to which our Saviour and his Apoſtles conſtantly appeal, are the miracles, wonders, and ſigns, which God did by the hand of Jeſus to confirm the authority and commiſſion he gave him to publiſh and declare his will to the world. This being the only reaſonable evidence that he could give of his coming from God, our Saviour ſays expreſsly, *If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had ſin*, John xv. 24. If he had not given theſe undeniable proofs of his being a teacher ſent from God, they would have been acquitted, not only in reaſon, but even out of his own mouth. *If I do not the works of my Father*, ſays he, *believe me not*, John x. 37: *If I bear witneſs of myſelf, my witneſs is not true*, John v. 31: and he adds, verſe 36, *The works which the Father hath given me to finiſh, the ſame works that I do, bear witneſs of me, that the Father ſent me.*

Thus, when St. John ſent to him to inquire expreſsly whether he was the Chriſt, or no, he ſhewed the meſſengers his works, and bade them relate to John what they had ſeen; referring it to him to judge by his works, which were the only proper evidence, whether he were the Chriſt, or no.

The truth then of Chriſtianity reſting upon the authority of miracles, I ſhall endeavour in the following diſcourſe to ſhew,

Firſt, Wherein the true force of this argument from miracles conſiſts, and what it is that they prove.

Secondly, What ſort of works are to be admitted for miracles in proving the truth of any religion.

Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew wherein the true force of this argument from miracles conſiſts, or what it is that they prove.

Miracles are not intended to prove the being of God, nor the doctrines of morality: for natural religion is ſupported by natural reaſon, and has for its evidence the works of nature. Thus St. Paul argues in his firſt chapter to the Romans, declaring that what was to be known of God was manifeſt to men, God having ſhewed it unto them: *For the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.* And in the moſt corrupt and degenerate times God did not leave himſelf without witneſs, continuing to do good, to give rain from heaven and fruitful ſeaſons, filling the hearts of men with joy and gladneſs. Theſe are the ſtanding proofs of the being and goodneſs of God: and men need but open their eyes, and look

found them, to ſee the wonderful and ſtupendous works of nature, which lead directly to the knowledge of God. And what greater evidence can man have than this? for, if the making one world will not prove the being of a God, the making of ten thouſand will not. And therefore this is a principle of religion not learnt from revelation, but which is always ſuppoſed as the foundation of revelation: for no revelation can bring greater works to prove its authority, than the works by which the clear and unexceptionable dictates of natural religion are proved: for the diſtinction between miracles and works of nature is no more than this, that works of nature are works of great power, produced conſtantly and in a regular courſe, which courſe we call nature; that miracles are works of great power alſo, wrought in an unuſual way: but they are both conſidered in the ſame light, and with equal advantage, as effects leading to the knowledge of a great, though inviſible, power. Thus we muſt acknowledge great power to be ſhewn in the Sun's conſtant riſing and ſetting; and as great in his ſtanding ſtill, ſhould we ſee him ſtopped in his courſe for the ſpace of a whole day. That we have all eyes to ſee, and ears to hear, is an effect of as great power, as giving ſight to one born blind, or hearing to one born deaf. Upon this account it is impoſſible that any true revelation ſhould contradict or evacuate any clear dictate of natural religion, which ſtands at leaſt upon as good a bottom as any revelation can do. And therefore the principles of natural religion muſt be ſuppoſed for the foundation of revealed: which is intimated by

the writer to the Hebrews: *He that comes to God, muſt believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him*; that is, he muſt bring this belief with him: for a revelation is not to prove the being of a God, or that he loves virtue, and hates vice. God never wrought miracles for this purpoſe, having ſufficiently evidenced himſelf from the beginning of the world by the viſible things of the creation: and had any one aſked our Saviour to ſhew a proof that there was a God, I am apt to imagine he would have turned him over to the works of nature, as he did the rich man's brethren to Moſes and the prophets for a proof of a future ſtate.

But, to aſcertain the uſe of miracles, it will be proper to conſider when and for what purpoſe they were introduced. In early times we meet with none: nor was there any occaſion for them, ſo long as men preſerved a right notion of God as maker and abſolute Lord of the univerſe, and were acquainted with him, (I had almoſt ſaid, perſonally acquainted with him,) and knew his voice when he ſpoke to them; for ſo long they received his commands without doubt or heſitation: and, being perfectly ſatisfied that the command came from God, what weight or authority could the multiplying ſigns and wonders add to their perſuaſion? for ſigns and wonders could only ſhew that the command came from God, to whom all nature obeyed and was ſubject: and, as they wanted no ſuch proof, there was no room or occaſion for the introducing of miracles.

But, when idolatry prevailed in the world, and every nation had its peculiar deity, to whom they gave the name of God, it became neceſſary, in

order to preſerve true religion in the world, to diſtinguiſh between the true God, and the pretended deities adored by the heathen. The great works of the creation were ſtanding proofs of the being of a God, and common to all nations; and therefore the belief of a Deity was the common perſuaſion of the world: for, though men in general were become idolaters, yet they were not atheiſts: but then the true God was forgotten or almoſt loſt in the multiplicity of falſe gods, to whom the blindneſs of the world aſcribed the honour and power due to the one Supreme only.

In this ſtate of things God thought proper to exert himſelf in ſuch acts of power as ſhould demonſtrate his ſuperiority above all gods of the heathen, and to aſſume a character of diſtinction, that the hand might be certainly known from which the mighty works proceeded: and it is very obſervable, that God did publicly aſſume ſuch a character, and work miracles, at one and the ſame time. The firſt miracles, of which we have any account, were thoſe wrought by Moſes in Egypt; and at the ſame time God declared himſelf to be the God of the Hebrews. And this was the firſt declaration of himſelf to the world under ſuch a character: for we do not read he ever ſtyled himſelf the God of Noah, or the God of Shem, or of any other perſon, till after the call of Abraham; for to him he appeared at firſt, and ſaid, *I am the almighty God*, Gen. xvii. 1. And, though in the family of Abraham he was known by the name of the God of Abraham, yet was not that relation underſtood in the world, till Moſes had expreſs command to make it known to Pharaoh and

his people. And the accuracy with which the meſſage was delivered, is obſervable: for, though God commanded Moſes in ſpeaking to the children of Iſrael to ſay, *The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob, hath ſent me*; yet in ſpeaking to the king of Egypt, who probably might know little of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, his orders are to ſay, *The God of the Hebrews hath met us*, &c. Exod. iii. 15, 18. and v. 3.

It may appear ſtrange to us to hear the great God, the creator of heaven and earth, aſſuming to himſelf a character that ſeems to limit the right of his dominion: for why does he, who is God of all the world, ſtyle himſelf *the God of the Hebrews?* Is he not the God of all nations? Or, why does he appeal to miracles wrought under the character of God of the Hebrews, when the great works of the creation (of all miracles the greateſt) are a conſtant and perpetual evidence of his almighty power and univerſal dominion?

To account for this, you muſt conſider the ſtate of religion in the world at the time when God aſſumed this character, and ſent Moſes to ſhew ſigns and wonders in the land of Egypt. All the nations of the earth had at that time their ſeveral local deities; and, as every nation is naturally inclined to think their own the beſt, a meſſage delivered in the name of the deity of any one people could have no effect upon another. And therefore, when Moſes delivered a meſſage to Pharaoh in the name of the God of Iſrael, Pharaoh's anſwer was, *Who is the Lord, that I ſhould obey his voice to let Iſrael go? I know not the Lord; neither will I let Iſrael go*, Exod.

. 8. Now the way which God made choice of to nvince Pharaoh was *by multiplying ſigns and won-rs in the land of Egypt, that the Egyptians might ow that he was the Lord, when he ſtretched forth s hand upon Egypt*, Exod. vii. 3, 5.

Here the queſtion plainly was between God under e character of the God of the Hebrews, and the od of the Egyptians, which of them was ſupreme: nd this point could only be determined by a ſupe-ority of power ſhewn in miracles. And, if we at-nd to the nature of the miracles wrought by Moſes, ey will appear to be ſuch as plainly pointed out e hand of the almighty Creator. The author of e book of Wiſdom tells us, *that the Egyptians, being ceived by the fooliſh devices of their wickedneſs, wor-pped ſerpents void of reaſon*, Wiſd. xi. 15. And the oſt ancient account we have of that people from ofane hiſtory confirms the obſervation. And there-e the firſt miracle performed by Moſes was a di-t conqueſt over the deities of Pharaoh: for, when s rod was changed into a ſerpent, and devoured all e ſerpents produced by the magicians, what could araoh reaſonably conclude, but that the God, in oſe name Moſes ſpoke, was *God of gods, and Lord lords?* And, when the magicians were compelled acknowledge the divine power of Moſes, and open-to declare to Pharaoh that the finger of God was it, one would imagine that this triumph over the ities and magicians of Egypt ſhould have furniſh-a complete anſwer to that demand of Pharaoh, *ho is the Lord, that I ſhould obey his voice?* But continued obſtinate.

But the purpoſe of God in ſending Moſes to ſhew his wonders in the land of Egypt was intended not only for the deliverance of the Hebrews, but to make his name known over all the nations of the earth: for, as Egypt was at that time a great and flouriſhing kingdom, and was notoriouſly the ſeat of ſuperſtition and idolatry, from whence the infection ſpread to all the nations round about, it was of all others the propereſt ſcene for God to exert his power and authority for the conviction of all people. And for this reaſon God had connived at the wickedneſs and idolatry of Egypt, and ſuffered the kingdom to grow very great, that their puniſhment might be the more exemplary: *In very deed for this cauſe have I raiſed thee up, for to ſhew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth,* Exod. ix. 16.

The miracles wrought in Egypt were ſuch as all the world had a concern in: for they were ſo near akin to the works of the creation, that by a juſt compariſon they might be known to come from the ſame hand: for who but the Author of nature could ſtir up things animate and inanimate to puniſh offenders? When God ſlew all the firſt-born in Egypt in one night, and preſerved the people of Iſrael in ſafety; when he led the people of Iſrael through the Red ſea by commanding the waters to open them a paſſage, and drowned Pharaoh and all his hoſt by bringing the waters back upon them; did not God by theſe ſigns plainly ſpeak to them, and ſay, *See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal;*

neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand? Deut. xxxii. 39.

This uſe of miracles appears throughout the hiſtory of the Jews. Thus, in the conteſt between Elijah and the prieſts of Baal, the Prophet laid before the people this choice: *If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him,* 1 Kings xviii. 21. The people were ſilent: the diſpute was referred to be determined by ſigns and wonders: and, when the people ſaw the hand of God made manifeſt, they fell on their faces, and ſaid, *The Lord, he is the God! the Lord, he is the God!* ver. 39.

The caſe of the deſtruction of the army of the Aſſyrians in the reign of Hezekiah, when an hundred and fourſcore and five thouſand men were deſtroyed in one night by the angel of God, ſeems to carry with it a ſeverity hard to be accounted for. The king of Aſſyria with his great hoſt laid ſiege to Jeruſalem; and ſo had other princes done without falling under ſo great calamity: but the caſe of Sennacherib had this peculiar in it, that he ſent a defiance to God, and boaſted himſelf of many victories obtained againſt him. Hear the meſſage he ſent to Hezekiah: *Thus ſaith the great king, the king of Aſſyria, What confidence is this wherein thou truſteſt? Hearken not unto Hezekiah: for thus ſaith the king of Aſſyria, Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Aſſyria? Who are they, among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that the Lord ſhould deliver Jeruſalem out of my hand?* 2 Kings xviii. You ſee here the king of Aſſyria acting the ſame part with the king of Egypt; and, if his

power was broken all at once, he ſuffered but in the ſame way that the king of Egypt did; and this judgment was brought upon him with the ſame view, to make him an example, and to vindicate and aſſert the ſupremacy of God in the eyes of all the nations.

This appears to be the firſt and original uſe of miracles, and they are an immediate and direct proof of what they are brought to aſſert, the ſupremacy of God. For, when the ſingle queſtion is, who is the mightieſt, muſt it not be decided in his favour who viſibly exerts the greateſt acts of power? In this caſe no difficulty can ariſe from the ſuppoſition that other beings as well as God are able to work miracles. The miracles performed by the magicians in Egypt were ſo far from leſſening the authority of the works done by Moſes, that they added to it: for the greater the powers were which God humbled and ſubdued, the greater evidence did he give of his own ſuperiority. So that, whether you ſuppoſe that evil ſpirits have natural powers to do ſuch and the like works, or are ſometimes employed and permitted by God, for the puniſhment of men, to deceive them by ſuch appearances, in both caſes they are equally ſubject to the power of God.

With reſpect to the people of the Jews, miracles had a double uſe: for by their long continuance in Egypt they became infected with the errors and ſuperſtitions of the country, and ſerved their idols. So that they wanted a proof that the God of their fathers was indeed the ſupreme Being, as much as the Egyptians themſelves. Thus the Prophet Ezekiel ſays in the name of God, *In the day when I choſe*

Iſrael, and lifted up mine hand unto the ſeed of the houſe of Jacob, and made myſelf known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, ſaying, I am the Lord your God;—then ſaid I unto them, Caſt ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourſelves with the idols of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled againſt me;—they did not caſt away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forſake the idols of Egypt, Ezek. xx. 5, &c. Which account given by the Prophet ſhews plainly their corrupt ſtate in Egypt; which was not eaſily worn off, as appears from their frequent acts of diſobedience in their paſſage through the wilderneſs, and their great propenſity to fall back into idolatry: ſo that God was frequently provoked to deſtroy them; and, had they been choſen for their own ſake, they would have been deſtroyed: but, God having made choice of them to be his own peculiar people, and intending to manifeſt himſelf to the heathen world by the protection of that people, *he ſaved them for his own name's ſake:* which is the account the Prophet Ezekiel gives, ſpeaking in the name of God, *I ſaid, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accompliſh my anger againſt them in the midſt of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's ſake, that it ſhould not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whoſe ſight I made myſelf known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt,* ver. 8, 9.

But there was another uſe of miracles peculiar to the Jews, in which the Egyptians had no concern: for Moſes was ſent not only to be their deliverer, but alſo to be their lawgiver. With the Egyptians

he had no covenant to make, nor new ſtatutes to give: he required of Pharaoh to let the children of Iſrael go; which in juſtice and equity he ought to have done, conſidering how his country had been ſaved by one of that family, and how highly he offended againſt the laws of hoſpitality by detaining them as ſlaves, who came into his country upon the hopes and promiſe of protection. But the Jews were called out of Egypt to be the peculiar people of God, and to be put under a new covenant and new laws, under the immediate government of God; bleſſings which they had no right to expect, and for the accompliſhment of which Moſes could give them no aſſurance, but by the evidence of ſuch works as plainly proceeded from the hand of God, and proved the commiſſion which Moſes had to ſpeak in his name.

The Jewiſh government, being a theocracy, leads us to expect a ſeries of miracles in the adminiſtration by the immediate hand of Providence; and ſo indeed we find the caſe to be: and the wonderful preſervation of that people, when obedient, and the as wonderful puniſhments, when they were diſobedient, were ſtanding proofs to themſelves, and to all the nations round about them, that their God was the only Lord and Governor of the world. But Moſes had no ſucceſſor as a lawgiver: prophets and righteous men were often ſent by God to reprove and admoniſh the people for their manifold tranſgreſſions of the law given by Moſes, but without any authority to add to, or diminiſh from it. And ſo the caſe ſtood, till the great Prophet, like unto Moſes, came in the full power and authority

of God to make a new covenant, not with one people, but with all the nations of the earth, *Jeſus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by miracles and wonders and ſigns.*

It has been before obſerved, that the great doctrines of natural religion have for their evidence the works of nature, and want not the ſupport of miracles. But, when any new doctrine is publiſhed to the world, or any new command, of which nature has given no notice, it is of neceſſity that ſuch new doctrines ſhould be eſtabliſhed by new proofs. One thing indeed we learn from natural reaſon, that God is to be truſted and obeyed in whatever he promiſes or commands: but ſtill a proof is required, that ſuch new doctrine or command does really proceed from God. And this ſhews how neceſſary miracles are to the introduction of a new revelation: not that miracles can prove the truth of any doctrine; but they directly prove the commiſſion of the perſon who does them to proceed from him by whoſe power alone they could be performed. This diſtinction between miracles conſidered as a proof of the doctrine, and as confirming the authority and commiſſion of the perſon who reveals it, will plainly appear, upon conſidering what the caſe would be, ſhould any man openly perform unqueſtionable miracles, and then retire in ſilence, without declaring any purpoſe he had: the great works might aſtoniſh and confound us; but we could not poſſibly make any uſe of them: we might indeed conclude, that ſome great and inviſible power aſſiſted and enabled the man to perform the works; but what that inviſible power had to do with us, or we

with it, we could by no juſt inference conclude. But, ſhould ſuch a man declare himſelf to be a meſſenger from God commiſſioned to publiſh his will to the world, and appeal to the great works which he did as a proof of the authority he had received; the miracles, though, conſidered in themſelves, they do not directly prove his doctrine, yet do they eſtabliſh his authority, and give the force of a divine command to what he publiſhes in God's name.

The law of Moſes then requiring ſubmiſſion and obedience to commands and doctrines which have no eſtabliſhment in the light of reaſon and nature, it was neceſſary to found them upon the authority of God, to which no ſubmiſſion could be due, till ſufficient evidence was given of it, to guard men againſt impoſition and deceit either from wicked men or wicked ſpirits: and this made miracles to be a neceſſary proof in the eſtabliſhment of a new revelation.

We ſee then to what purpoſes miracles were originally introduced, and in what manner applied, by Moſes: and, whoever conſiders of what conſequence it was to the happineſs of mankind to have a ſtanding evidence always before their eyes of the unity and ſupremacy of God manifeſted in his government of the Jewiſh nation, and how far the Moſaic diſpenſation prepared the way, and laid the foundation, for the accompliſhment of his great work in the ſalvation of the world by Chriſt Jeſus, will ſee reaſon to think that the end propoſed was worthy of God, and fully accounts for his interpoſition by ſigns and wonders, which were acts not only of

great power, but of great goodneſs and benevolence towards mankind.

If we conſider the miracles of the Goſpel, we ſhall find that they had the ſame ends in view. If Moſes withſtood the magicians of Egypt, and manifeſted a ſuperiority of power over them, and the falſe gods whom they ſerved, our Saviour did much more in oppoſition to the power of Satan, and the wicked ſpirits who had taken poſſeſſion of men, and tormented them in divers manners: in ſubduing them he ſhewed ſuch an uncontrollable power, that they were obedient to his command; and, when he ſaid Go, they were forced to go, yielding a ready, though unwilling, obedience. And, as the Goſpel ſpread, idolatry fled before it, the heathen deities became dumb, and their oracles were ſilenced. And, if we look abroad into the world, and take a view of the nations where idolatry and ſuperſtition once prevailed, and where the knowledge of the unity and ſupremacy of God is now eſtabliſhed, which happy change can only be aſcribed to the propagation of the Goſpel, we ſhall ſee how fully and perfectly this great end was anſwered by the miracles wrought by Chriſt.

If Moſes had a commiſſion from God to publiſh his will to the people of the Jews, Jeſus had a far more ample commiſſion to publiſh the terms of God's ſalvation to all mankind: and, as theſe terms were of God's appointment, and not ſuch as human wiſdom could ſuggeſt, they ſtood in need of the evidence of miracles to ſupport them.

It has been obſerved before, that no miracles can alter the clear dictates of natural religion. The

ſame may be ſaid with reſpect to any former divine revelation: for to ſuppoſe a revelation to come from God, and to be fully eſtabliſhed by miracles, and that a later revelation upon the like proof and authority ſhould abrogate and render the former void, would be ſetting up miracle againſt miracle, and deſtroy the authority of both: and therefore, admitting the Moſaic revelation and the Chriſtian to be both of divine original, they muſt neceſſarily be conſiſtent, and each be in its proper place to carry on the great and ultimate views of Providence. This evidently was the caſe of Moſes, who came to prepare the way for the full and perfect declaration of God's will, reſerved till He ſhould come who was the end of the law: and to this purpoſe are the words of our bleſſed Saviour, *Think not that I am come to deſtroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil. For verily I ſay unto you, Till heaven and earth paſs, one jot or one tittle ſhall in no wiſe paſs from the law, till all be fulfilled*, Matt. v. 17, 18. And during the whole courſe of his miniſtry he conſtantly appealed to the teſtimony of the law and the prophets: *Had you believed in Moſes*, ſays he to the Jews, *you would have believed me; for he wrote of me.* And his Apoſtle St. Paul, in his defence before king Agrippa, gives this account of the Goſpel he preached: *Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witneſſing both to ſmall and great, ſaying none other things than thoſe which the prophets and Moſes did ſay ſhould come.* And indeed one revelation admitted to be of divine authority muſt be a touchſtone to try all ſucceeding revelations by: for God cannot con-

tradict himſelf; and the great works done by Moſes and by Chriſt are not only an evidence of their divine authority, but are a bar to all ſucceeding pretenders. The miracles reported to have been done in the heathen world are unworthy of God, conſidered either in themſelves, or the end propoſed by them: for let it be obſerved, that God never works miracles merely to aſtoniſh and ſurpriſe people, but always to ſerve ſome great ends of providence: and though he has in favour of his people, and ſometimes even of particular perſons, wrought a miracle; yet, when he publiſhed the Law and the Goſpel, he did not reſt the authority upon one or more ſingle miracles, but upon a long ſeries of miracles exhibited from day to day for years together. And, if miracles are properly applied as a proof of the purpoſes and the will of God, miracles wrought without being attended with any declaration of God's will in which we have any concern, are very improper inſtances to be ſet up in oppoſition to thoſe of Moſes and Chriſt, upon which the happineſs of mankind depends in this life, and that which is to come. This conſideration gives weight and authority to the miracles of the Goſpel: for it was a deſign worthy of God to reſtore mankind to that happineſs which they had forfeited: and it was a work in every view of equal dignity and benevolence with the creation: for, if God is adorable in the work of the creation, he is equally ſo in the work of redemption; and there is at leaſt as much goodneſs in making men happy, as in making them at all.

With what colour of reaſon can the pretended

miracles of the heathen world be brought into this queſtion, which were done upon trifling occaſions, unworthy of the interpoſition of God? Look into all the ancient oracles; ſee to what mean purpoſes they are applied, and how often they prove deſtructive to thoſe who relied on them; and then tell me what marks you ſee of divine wiſdom or goodneſs in them, that ſhould ſet them upon an equal foot with the miracles of Chriſt Jeſus.

We read in the Old Teſtament of ſome miracles wrought in behalf of particular people, and for particular purpoſes: but neither are theſe, though of divine authority, to be ſet in competition with the miracles of the Goſpel: for they were not introductory to any ſcheme of religion, or new declaration of God's will, but are rather to be conſidered as acts of government, and ſuitable to the character of God as king of Iſrael; for, where the government itſelf was divine, no wonder to ſee the meaſures of the government to be of the ſame kind. And this character of God being peculiar to the Jews, is the reaſon why ſuch miracles were frequent under the Jewiſh law, and are very rarely to be met with under the Goſpel.

Secondly, I am to conſider what ſort of works are to be admitted for miracles in proving the truth of any religion.

The firſt ſuſpicion that men naturally have of any one who pretends to prophecy or inſpiration, is, that he has contrived the whole matter himſelf: for we have ſeen many viſions and inſpirations impoſed on the vulgar by men of very bad heads or very bad hearts. And therefore the firſt inquiry is, whether

the miracles might not proceed from human art or cunning.

And ſhall I undertake to prove, that it exceeds the power of man to raiſe the dead to life, to give ſight to the blind, and to cure all diſeaſes by the word of his mouth? No: never was any ſuch attempt ſet up. But perhaps no ſuch miracles were ever really done, and the people were deceived by falſe appearances. As for inſtance; When the man born blind was reſtored to ſight, he did not indeed recover his eyes, but all the reſt of the people loſt theirs; which I think would be the greater miracle of the two: for it is as eaſy to believe that the word of Chriſt ſhould make one man ſee, as that it ſhould make a thouſand blind.

But muſt they, you will ſay, of neceſſity proceed from God, becauſe they could not be wrought by men? Were they effects of nothing elſe but infinite power?

The miracles of the Goſpel, being ſuch works as neither human wiſdom or power can perform, force us to have recourſe to a ſuperior inviſible cauſe. But ſtill you will ſay, Can the wit of man diſcover all the different orders of beings between himſelf and his Creator, their powers and properties, ſo as with ſecurity to affirm that no being but the all-wiſe and almighty God could perform theſe wonderful things; eſpecially conſidering that no effects, neither the miracles of the Goſpel, nor the works of nature, can prove directly an infinite power or wiſdom? For who will be bold to ſay, that the wiſdom and power of God were exhauſted in the viſible works of the creation, ſo that there is nothing either wiſer or

greater that infinite wiſdom and power can contrive or execute?

Let this matter be rightly ſtated, and thus it will ſtand: The works of nature are certain proofs of an all-powerful cauſe; not becauſe they appear to be works of infinite power, and ſuch as cannot be exceeded, but becauſe of neceſſity they prove in courſe of argument a firſt cauſe of all things; which firſt cauſe being unlimited, nothing is or can poſſibly be done, that the power of the firſt cauſe cannot do. And therefore the works of the creation muſt be and are admitted as an infallible proof of the being of a God. Let it then be remembered, that a revelation is not introduced to prove the being of a God; that the miracles of our Saviour were not wrought to that purpoſe, but, ſuppoſing the being of a God, to prove God the author of the revelation: and then it muſt be allowed, that, if we bring as good arguments to prove God the author of the revelation, as can be brought to prove the being of God, all who believe the being of a God are equally obliged to believe the divinity of the revelation.

The firſt and moſt natural notion of God is, that he is the maker of the world, and all things in it. This was the notion the Jews had of God; and, when they diſtinguiſhed the true God from the heathen gods, they defined him to be the maker of the world and mankind. Look then into the miracles of the Goſpel, and you will ſee this attribute of God as clearly demonſtrated by them as by the works of nature: for there you will find, that the Author of the Chriſtian miracles is the maker of mankind; for by him men were made; that is, dead bodies were

nade into living men: for to raiſe a dead man, and o make a new man, are much the ſame thing. Any natter may be formed even by human art into the ſhape of a man; but it is adding life that makes the man. If we believe we received our ſenſes, our reaſon, our natural ſtrength and vigour, from the true God at firſt; look into the Goſpel, and you will find the miracles of Chriſt are from the ſame hand: for to the blind he gave ſight, to the deaf hearing, to the lame and ſick ſtrength and ſoundneſs, to demoniacs and lunatics he gave reaſon and a right mind. Or, if you chooſe rather to look into the material world for the proof of a God; if you think the beauty, order, and regularity of the world ſpeak God to be both author and governor of nature; ſearch the Goſpel, and you will find the miracles of Chriſt derive themſelves from the Governor of the world, and ſpeak the ſame language with the works of nature: for at his word the ſtormy winds were laid; the ſea obeyed his voice: when he ſuffered, all nature trembled; the earth ſhook, the vail of the temple was rent, the ſun and the moon were darkened: which drew from the centurion attending at his execution the confeſſion, *Truly this was the Son of God.* If you appeal to the natural ſenſe and notions of mankind for the idea of the true God, and thence collect his eſſential attributes, juſtice, righteouſneſs, holineſs and goodneſs; let the voice of nature be ſtill; and the Goſpel ſhall ſpeak more plainly, how juſt, how righteous, how holy and good God is, who is author of the ſalvation and redemption which is by Chriſt Jeſus. Take what way you will to prove the being or the attributes of God, and in the ſame

way with equal advantage we will prove the God of the world, that is, the only true God, to be the author of Chriſtianity; which all who believe the being of a God are bound to admit for a proof of the truth of Chriſtianity: for either the works of nature are not a good proof of the being of a God; or the works of the Goſpel, being of the ſame kind, and effects of equal power, muſt be allowed to prove God the author of the Goſpel. And, when our Saviour ſtyled the wonders that he performed, *the works that the Father had given him to finiſh*, he plainly appealed to the power of the Creator as manifeſted in the works that bore witneſs to him: for, if any one elſe could have done the ſame works, there would have been no reaſon for calling them the works of the Father, nor would there have been any room for the inference which our Saviour draws from it, *The Father himſelf, which hath ſent me, hath borne witneſs of me*, John v. 37.

There is a queſtion commonly aſked upon this occaſion, to which it may be proper to give an anſwer: that is, How we know that theſe miracles did not proceed from an evil power, ſince we have inſtances, as ſome think, of miracles ſo wrought? The anſwer is, We know this the ſame way that any man knows the works of nature to proceed from a good being: for how do you know that the Creator of the world was a good being? If you anſwer, that the Maker of mankind, the Author of nature, muſt of neceſſity be a good and holy being, becauſe he has woven into the nature of man the love of virtue and hatred of vice, and given him diſtinct notions of good and evil, by which reaſon unerringly con-

cludes the Author of this nature and theſe principles to be himſelf good and holy; I anſwer the ſame for the Goſpel of Chriſt: the love of virtue, and hatred of vice, is as inſeparable from the Goſpel of Chriſt, as from the reaſon of man; and the Goſpel of Chriſt more diſtinctly teaches to know and acknowledge the holineſs and goodneſs of God, than reaſon, or the works of nature, can do: and therefore thoſe who acknowledge the Author of nature to be a good being, have much more reaſon to acknowledge the Author of the Chriſtian miracles to be a good being. But then we are told this is arguing in a circle; proving the doctrines firſt by miracles, and then the miracles again by the doctrines. But this is a great miſtake, and it lies in this; that men do not diſtinguiſh between the doctrines we prove by miracles, and the doctrines by which we try miracles; for they are not the ſame doctrines. God never wrought miracles to prove the difference between good and evil: and I ſuppoſe, if any man were aſked how he proves temperance or chaſtity to be duties, murder or adultery to be ſins, he would not recur to miracles for an argument. Theſe and the like duties are enforced in the Goſpel, but were always truths and duties before our Saviour's coming: and we are in poſſeſſion of them without the help of miracles or revelation. And theſe are the doctrines by which we try the miracles.

But the doctrines which are to be proved by miracles are the new revealed doctrines of Chriſtianity, which were neither known or knowable to the reaſon of man: ſuch are the doctrines of ſalvation

and redemption by Chriſt, of ſanctification and regeneration by the Spirit of God: and who ever yet brought theſe doctrines to prove the truth or divine original of the miracles?

I ſhall only add, that what has been ſaid it concerns thoſe chiefly to conſider, who hold faſt and admire the principles of natural religion, but deſpiſe or overlook the proofs of Chriſtianity. If they will but conſider the tendency of their own principles, they are not far from the kingdom of God: for the ſame reaſons, that oblige them to believe in God, oblige them to believe in Chriſt alſo. And, as we have one God the Father of all, ſo ſhould we have one faith, and one Lord, even Jeſus Chriſt, the Saviour and Redeemer of us all. And let them take heed, that, having been made partakers of ſo much grace, to the acknowledgement of the one true God, they fall not the more irrecoverably under condemnation by obſtinately refuſing to acknowledge his only and eternal Son, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous.

DISCOURSE XI.

PSALM viii. 4.

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the ſon of man, that thou viſiteſt him?

WHEN we conſider the care of Providence over the children of men, as it is manifeſted either in the works of nature or of grace, we naturally fall into the reflection of the text, and wonder to ſee ſo much done for men, who ſeem to have no merit or deſert equal to the concern ſhewed for them. If we look up to the heavens, and view the ſun, moon, and ſtars, and conſider the power by which theſe mighty bodies were formed, the wiſdom and contrivance by which their motions are regulated and adjuſted; we ſee plainly, by the benefit we receive from them, that they were intended for our ſervice: and yet what are we, that we ſhould be ſo ſerved? If we look round this earth, the place of our habitation, we find it filled with many kinds of creatures, and adorned by the bountiful hand of nature, as if it were meant to be a ſeat of pleaſure and happineſs; and we are ſure that this part of the world, at leaſt, was made for the benefit of man: here he is lord, and has dominion over the works of God; for on

earth there is no creature to rival him in power and wiſdom, or that can challenge any ſhare of authority with him. But this lord of the earth, does he not come into it helpleſs? is he not wretched whilſt he is in it, and oftentimes miſerable when he is to go out of it? What muſt we ſay then? that this noble palace was erected and adorned merely to be turned into an hoſpital to receive the blind and the lame, the diſeaſed in body and mind; to be the ſeat of him *who is like a thing of nought, and his days like a ſhadow that paſſeth away.*

If we go on from the works of nature to the works of grace, the ſame reflection will purſue us ſtill. One would imagine, that man, who had received ſo much from God, ſhould at leaſt continue to ſerve and obey his ſupreme Lord, and to acknowledge the Author of theſe great and good gifts: ſo far from it, that God was in a manner expelled from his own creation, and ſtocks and ſtones and the beaſts of the field were exalted and ſet up to receive the honour and worſhip due to the Creator. The morality of the world became anſwerable to the religion of it; and no wonder: for why ſhould he not turn brute himſelf, who can be content with a brute for his God? The wonder lies on the other ſide, that God ſhould continue his care and concern for ſuch creatures; that he ſhould be willing not only to forgive their iniquities, but that he ſhould contrive the means of their redemption; and that in ſo wonderful a manner, as to ſend his own Son into the world, not only to inſtruct and reform them, but to redeem them by making atonement for their ſins by his own blood. Who that conſiders this can help

ſaying with the Pſalmiſt, *What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the ſon of man, that thou viſiteſt him?*

Though theſe reflections ſhould naturally lead us to admire and adore the goodneſs of God, who has done ſo much, when we deſerved ſo little; for what ſtronger motive can there be for gratitude, than undeſerved favour? yet have they oftentimes another effect: for, when men conſider that God does nothing without reaſon, and at the ſame time ſee ſo little reaſon why God ſhould do ſo much for them, they begin to ſuſpect whether he has done it or no, and to imagine that the whole hiſtory of the redemption is a cunningly deviſed fable. To conſider the Son of God coming down from heaven, living among men, and at laſt ſhedding his blood for them, fills them with wonder and aſtoniſhment: and when they look on the other ſide, they can ſee nothing in man that bears any proportion to this concern ſhewed for him, or that yields any argument to juſtify the wiſdom of God in this method of his redemption.

It muſt be owned, there is ſomething plauſible in this way of reaſoning; and the more ſo, as it pretends to do juſtice to the wiſdom of God, and cannot be charged with any great injuſtice done to the character of man. But this prejudice, be the foundation of it good or bad, lies as ſtrongly againſt the works of nature, as it does againſt the works of grace: for it is as hard to conceive that God ſhould create this world for the ſake of placing in it ſuch creatures as we are, as it is to conceive that he ſhould ſend his Son to redeem us.

If you can juſtify the wiſdom and goodneſs of God in making ſuch creatures, it will be no hard thing to juſtify his wiſdom and goodneſs in redeeming them: for to open a way for men to eſcape out of a ſtate of miſery is a more divine and beneficent act, than the putting them into it. If you ſtumble at the dignity of the Redeemer, and think that the Son of God was too great a perſon to be concerned in ſaving men; for the ſame reaſon you ſhould think that God, or the Son of God, was too great a perſon to be concerned in making ſuch creatures as men: and from theſe and the like conſiderations you may as well conclude that God never made the world, as you do that he never redeemed it. But, in ſpite of all theſe reaſons, you ſee plainly, that this earth was made for the habitation of men, wicked and inconſiderable as they are. Since therefore your conſequence will not hold in this caſe, you have no reaſon to depend on it in the other; but rather to think that, ſince it was agreeable to the wiſdom and goodneſs of God to exert his power to make ſuch creatures, it was alſo conſiſtent that he ſhould exert his power to ſave and to redeem them.

It can ſerve to no good purpoſe to give men a great opinion of themſelves, and of the conſiderable figure they make in the univerſe; nor can it be done with truth and juſtice. Experience, which ſhews us daily our own and the follies of thoſe about us, will be too hard for all reaſonings upon this foot; and the mind of man, conſcious of its own defects, will ſee through the flattery, which aſcribes to it perfections and excellencies with which

it feels itſelf to be unacquainted. Or, could a man, in ſpite of his own experience, be perſuaded to think himſelf very conſiderable, and worthy of all that God has done for him; this opinion could tend only to make him proud and conceited, and to think the diſpenſations of Providence with regard to himſelf to be rather acts of juſtice, and due to his merit, than the effects of goodneſs and benignity in the Governor of the world. Such an opinion would in a great meaſure exclude a ſenſe of dependence, and in a greater ſtill a ſenſe of gratitude; which are vital and fundamental principles in religion.

But, if we ſet out with taking a proper view of ourſelves in the firſt place, and with conſidering the many imperfections and follies to which we are liable as rational agents, the many weakneſſes and infirmities which ſurround us as animal creatures; and then ſurvey the works of Providence, and the great care of God over us, manifeſted in his various diſpenſations in the natural and moral world; we ſhall eaſily enter into the true ſpirit of the holy Pſalmiſt's reflection, *What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the ſon of man, that thou viſiteſt him?* It is a reflection naturally proceeding from the ſenſe of our dependence on God, and leading to the higheſt degree of gratitude, whilſt we contemplate with admiration the greateſt of his favours, and conſider ourſelves as unworthy of his leaſt.

This is the natural ſenſe which the reflection in the text ſuggeſts to us: yet has it, as I obſerved before, been uſed to other purpoſes; and ſome have thought it unworthy of God to ſuppoſe that

in the great works of providence he had any ſpecial regard to ſo inconſiderable a part of the whole, as the race of men appears to be. The objection, they think, grows ſtronger, when the ſcheme of providence diſplayed to us in the Goſpel of Chriſt for the ſalvation of man is laid before them; and it appears to them aſtoniſhing, that God ſhould intereſt himſelf ſo particularly in an affair, which ſeems, when compared to the whole, of ſo little importance. If we aſcribe this great work to the divine love and goodneſs, it cannot be controverted that they are ſtrongly and evidently expreſſed and manifeſted in this proceeding; too ſtrongly, it may be thought; ſince divine love and goodneſs muſt be bounded by divine wiſdom, and can never degenerate into fondneſs and partiality; conſequently, his love and goodneſs can never do what his wiſdom does not approve as fit to be done.

Upon this foot it may be aſked, Where is the wiſdom of erecting ſuch a building as this for the ſervice of ſuch a creature as man? The works of nature are ſo immenſe and wonderful, that, if they are formed for the ſake of providing a proper habitation for man, the houſe ſeems to be of far greater dignity than the maſter, and the end propoſed by no means to anſwer and juſtify the means made uſe of. So again, in the work of our redemption, if the only Son of God came down from heaven, and did and ſuffered all that is reported of him in the Goſpel; what is there in man, conſidered in the moſt advantageous light, that bears any proportion to this wonderful method made uſe of to ſave him, or to juſtify the wiſdom of God in ſending the Lord

of power, and of the whole creation, to die for the meaneſt, perhaps, of all intelligent beings belonging to it?

Now, whether theſe reflections upon our own weak and infirm condition, and the low rank we hold in the order of intelligent beings, be a ſufficient ground for calling into queſtion the credibility of the great things ſaid to be done for us, is a matter deſerving ſerious conſideration. And

The firſt queſtion we ſhould aſk ourſelves, is, whether we are proper judges in this matter? It is a great undertaking to judge of the wiſdom of God, and to ſay what is fit, or not fit, for him to do; eſpecially where the ſubject of the inquiry is the counſels of God in governing the natural and moral world; points, not only of the higheſt conſequence, but of all others the moſt removed out of our ſight.

In human affairs we pretty well know the powers and abilities of men, and can oftentimes judge of the ends they propoſe to themſelves; and this knowledge of their powers, and this ability to judge of the ends they propoſe, qualifies us in many caſes to eſtimate comparatively the means and the end; and to diſcern whether the thing aimed at is worth the expence or labour employed in obtaining it. This judgment cannot be made merely by conſidering and comparing the means and the end together; but conſideration likewiſe muſt be had of the power and ability of the agent. The end of building an houſe is for the habitation of men: but, whether the houſe be too big, or too little, too magnificent, or not magnificent enough, can never

appear from conſidering merely the end of building of an houſe, which is for men to dwell in; but you muſt take into the account the power, ſtation, wealth, and other circumſtances of the builder, and then you may reaſonably ſay whether too much or too little pains and coſt have been beſtowed on it. To apply this to the preſent caſe: When you view the works of nature, you think them too great and too magnificent to be intended for the uſe of man: but conſider a little, Who is the builder? Is it not one of whoſe power and ability you cannot poſſibly judge? How do you know then that it was not as eaſy (and doubtleſs it was as eaſy) to God to produce this beautiful and wonderful order of things, as to have produced a much worſe, and more adapted, as you may imagine, to the circumſtances of man, the inhabitant of this world? You cannot ſay, too much pains, or too much coſt, has been beſtowed: for all theſe conſiderations are relative to the power of the agent; and, when the agent has infinite power, this conſideration is wholly excluded.

But farther; in order to judge rightly in the caſe before us, we ought perfectly to comprehend the end propoſed. If you ſee a great building, but know not for what uſe it was intended, nor what uſe is made of it, it is impoſſible to judge whether it be too large or too confined; for that judgment muſt ariſe neceſſarily from knowing to what purpoſe and to what uſe it was erected. And where is the man, who will pretend to know all the ends of God in the creation of the univerſe? What relates to ourſelves we know tolerably well from ſenſe and

experience: we feel the influence of the heavenly bodies, and are ſure that we are the better for them; but, that no others are beſides ourſelves, we can never be ſure.

Since then we know nothing of the power of God but that it is infinite; the true conſequence from which is, that all poſſible things are equally eaſy to be effected by his hand; ſince the purpoſes of God to be ſerved in the creation of the univerſe are various, and more than we can diſcover, probably more than we can even imagine; we act the abſurdeſt part in the world, when we pretend to judge of the works of Providence by comparing the greatneſs of the works of nature with ſuch ends and purpoſes as we can diſcover to be ſerved by them: for, with reſpect to the infinite power of God, we talk childiſhly, when we call his works great, or little; and, with reſpect to the ends and purpoſes of Providence, ſuppoſing a juſt meaſure of his works were to be taken from thence, yet it is a meaſure of which we are not maſters.

As this reaſoning muſt neceſſarily hold in the works of nature; ſo is it equally ſtrong, when applied to the works of grace. It is indeed a ſurpriſing and wonderful event, the coming of the Son of God into this world, being made man, and born of a pure virgin, living and dying as a man, to redeem ſinners. But what is there that ſhocks your faith in this? You think perhaps the means too great and too conſiderable to be made uſe of for the ſake of the end propoſed, which might have been obtained at a cheaper rate. But, when you ſay or think this, do you pretend to know by what other

way all the purpoſes of God in ſending his Son into the world might have been anſwered? If you do not, poſſibly this was the only way to anſwer all the ends and intentions of Providence in this great work; and, if it was, the means uſed were neceſſary, and therefore, without doubt, proper: and, ſuppoſing them proper, you will not ſurely be ſurpriſed, that God ſhould deſign, and his bleſſed Son undertake to perform, what was proper to execute the wiſe ends of Providence. It was indeed a very great thing for a man to be born of a virgin: but in what ſenſe was it great? only as being unuſual, and contrary to the eſtabliſhed courſe, in our eyes: with reſpect to God, I ſee no reaſon to call it ſo. Were God to form a new race under this new law of nature, that all ſhould be born of virgins, I conceive, there would be nothing in it more wonderful than in the preſent eſtabliſhed courſe of nature.

It is more wonderful ſtill to think of the Son of God living on earth in the form and faſhion of a man: and, if we ſpeak in relation to our own abilities of ſearching into this myſterious work, it is, and it ever muſt continue to be, a wonder: but, with reſpect to God, have you any reaſon to think this wonderful and myſterious, or a thing difficult to be performed? God has united our ſpirits, our ſouls, to theſe bodies: a wonderful and myſterious thing it is to us: but can you imagine there is any thing in the works of God, that is wonderful, myſterious, or difficult in the execution to him? If not, how weakly do we amuſe ourſelves, when we ſet ourſelves with great wiſdom to weigh the works of God in

our ſcales, and to judge which are great and difficult in the performance?

But this is not the only miſtake men are liable to, when they ſet themſelves up for judges in this matter. That the redemption and ſalvation of men is the end of Chriſt's coming into the world, is certain, and is revealed in the Goſpel: but whoever ſhall ſay God had no other purpoſe in view than this only, will judge haſtily, and, I doubt, raſhly. What relates to us immediately in this great diſpenſation, God has been pleaſed to reveal to us diſtinctly; but he has no where told us that we are the only perſons concerned: that others probably are, may be collected from many intimations in Scripture. Our bleſſed Redeemer has *all power given him in heaven* as well as in earth: *principalities and powers*, the inviſible powers, *are made ſubject to him:* and they cannot be thought to be unconcerned in that work, for the ſake of which their King was exalted, and *every knee* made *to bow* to him. How they are concerned, we know not: but this we know, that we are but a ſmall part of the natural world. That there are many intelligent beings beſides ourſelves, we know: that they may be numberleſs, we have reaſon to believe: that God is the common governor of all, is out of queſtion: that all his diſpenſations in the moral government of the world regard the whole, and will finally appear in the eyes of every rational creature to be juſt and equal, we have great reaſon to conclude; and that God *will be juſtified in his ſayings, and clear when he is judged.* If this be ſo, the great work of our redemption, however immediately it relates to us,

muſt be ſuppoſed adapted to anſwer the general ends and purpoſes of God's government in the univerſal moral world. And this plainly ſhews, that we cannot judge of the propriety of the means made uſe of for redeeming the world by conſidering only the relation they have to men; for probably they relate to others, and to other purpoſes, and are, upon the whole, in every reſpect proper and fit: but the propriety cannot be diſcerned by us, nor will it, till we come into a clearer light, and ſee the whole ſcheme of Providence together.

You ſee then, upon the whole, that the objections againſt God's government in the natural and moral world, founded upon the diſproportion between the means made uſe of, and the ends propoſed, are really the effects of ſhortſightedneſs, and of that great propenſity which men have to judge, though they want proper materials to form a judgment upon.

But let us conſider, whether the obſervations, which have given riſe to theſe perverſe reaſonings, will not, if duly attended to, open a way to far other and far juſter concluſions. That men are weak and wretched, and not worthy of the care of Providence over them, we know by ſad experience; and have reaſon enough, in this view, to fall into the Pſalmiſt's reflection, *Lord, what is man, that thou regardeſt him?* But ſtill moſt certain it is, that God does regard man: all nature bears witneſs to the truth of this; for he is ſerved by the works of nature: and, though the works of nature may ſerve an hundred purpoſes more, yet it cannot be doubted but that they were made to ſerve man, though

him alone. This muſt appear upon the ſtrict-
nquiry: for, conſidering this ſolar ſyſtem, of
:h we are a part, we have no reaſon to think but
it bears as great proportion to the whole, as
other ſyſtem: in this ſyſtem our earth is one
iderable part; and this part was manifeſtly pre-
d for man, who has dominion over it. So that
human race is no inconſiderable part of the
tion in this way of reckoning: and it is reaſon-
to ſay, that the world was made, if not for him
, yet as much and as truly for him, as for
:rs.

eing then poſſeſſed of this fact, that, weak and
m as we are, God has abundantly provided for
n this life; and that, conſidered as part of the
ıral world, we have a very full proportion of
d things allotted to us; what concluſion does it
l us to, if we conſider ourſelves as part of the ra-
al and moral world? Is it reaſonable to imagine,
: God has taken ſo much care of us in his natu-
government of the world, and that he will neg-
: us in the moral part of it? that he regards us
animals, but has no regard to us as rational
nts? Can any man think ſeriouſly of God, as a
ſonable, juſt, and upright being, and ſuppoſe
ı to be the caſe?

Now, theſe conſiderations lay a foundation for a
: expectation from the goodneſs of God of his
ſtance in our caſe, where it is moſt wanted; that
for his aſſiſtance to us as rational and moral be-
s, as capable of being happy or miſerable by vir-
or by vice.

There is a ſimilitude and proportion in all the

works of God: and it is reaſonable to infer, from the viſible regard ſhewed to us in one reſpect, the regard had for us in all; eſpecially in the principal and moſt concerning relation in which we ſtand towards him; that is, as rational agents. And this leads us directly to ſuppoſe that God will provide for our well-being as moral and religious creatures, with a care, at leaſt, equal to that ſhewn for us in our natural capacity in this world.

Join now to this preſumption what the Goſpel has expreſsly revealed to us, and ſee whether the whole is not of a piece, and conſiſtent.

The Goſpel tells us, that God has ſent his Son to redeem us: you wonder he ſhould take ſo much trouble for ſuch creatures: but is it not as becoming his goodneſs to redeem us, as it was to make us? You will ſay perhaps, we are ſince that become ſinners. True; and yet ever ſince that he has preſerved us, and afforded us the bleſſings of this life: and is it not of a piece to open to us the hopes of a better? Miſtake not my meaning: I do not mean to infer from what God does for us in this world, that he is bound in juſtice to do as much for us in reſpect to another. I know of nothing that he is bound in juſtice to do for us. But ſurely it is ſafeſt reaſoning upon the ways of providence from the manifeſt works of providence: and by ſeeing how God has dealt with the children of men as part and as inhabitants of this natural world, it is reaſonable to conclude in what manner he will treat them as part of the moral world. And, if we conſider what we ſee and know of the works of nature, and of the good we enjoy from them, and compare them

with the greater works of grace, as manifeſted in the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus, we may eaſily diſcern the conſiſtency and harmony of God's dealings in both caſes; and ſee too, at the ſame time, that the methods of Providence by which we hope to be ſaved, and which we have from revelation, are liable to no other objections, than the methods of Providence by which we live, and which we ſee daily with our eyes. In both caſes the works of God are indeed wonderful, and we unworthy of the leaſt of them: and we may juſtly ſay of both, *Lord, what is man, that thou regardeſt him? and the ſon of man, that thou viſiteſt him?*

DISCOURSE XII.

ACTS x. 34, 35.

Then Peter opened his mouth, and ſaid, Of a truth I perceive that God is no reſpecter of perſons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him.

THESE words, if not carefully attended to, may ſeem to carry a ſenſe contrary to the meaning of the Apoſtle in delivering them. St. Peter in the text declares, that God, without reſpect to any national or perſonal privileges, was ready to admit all people into the covenant made with Chriſt Jeſus, provided they were duly prepared for ſuch admiſſion. Some from his words have concluded that there is no neceſſity of becoming diſciples of Chriſt, but that it is ſufficient if we live according to the principles and light of nature; foraſmuch as *every one who feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him:* and thus ſupported, as they think, by one paſſage of Scripture, they have been emboldened to deſpiſe and reject all the reſt as of no uſe to them, and to put their ſalvation upon their own ſtrength, in oppoſition to the method revealed and declared by the Son of God. This error is common, as well

as dangerous: and, ſince the great regard which ſome pay to moral virtue is purely oppoſition to the Goſpel, it is worth while to examine this paſſage of St. Peter, and to place his meaning in a true light, that the doctrine of the Goſpel may not be overthrown by its own authority.

The Jews had a notion that the bleſſings of the promiſed Meſſias were to be peculiar to themſelves, and not to be extended to any other nation or people whatever, whom they looked on as aliens from God, and not under his care and protection, as they were. Hence in the Prophets they plead their privilege, and tell God that he is not God of the heathen, but of the people of Iſrael; which conceit of theirs St. Paul refers to and confutes in his Epiſtle to the Romans: *Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not alſo of the Gentiles? yes, of the Gentiles alſo.* The Diſciples of our Lord, and eſpecially St. Peter, were as deep in this opinion as others; and, during our Saviour's abode on earth, they were confirmed in it by what they obſerved in him: he declared, *he was not ſent but to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael:* and, when he ſent out his Diſciples to preach, he expreſsly charged them *not to go into the way of the Gentiles, nor to enter into any city of the Samaritans; but to go rather to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael:* and after his reſurrection, when he enlarged their commiſſion, and bade them *Go, teach all nations*; they underſtood him not, but were inquiſitive about *his reſtoring the kingdom to Iſrael.* After the aſcenſion the Apoſtles continued at Jeruſalem preaching to their own nation, till, upon the perſecution of St. Stephen,

many fled into other parts, and, though they went as far as Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch, yet they *preached the word to none but Jews only*, Acts xi. 19. And when St. Peter, admoniſhed by an heavenly viſion, had admitted ſome Gentiles into the church of Chriſt through baptiſm, he was called to an account for it by the Apoſtles and brethren who were in Judea, chap. xi. 1: nor were they ſatisfied, till he told them what viſion he had ſeen, what alſo Cornelius had ſeen, and in what a miraculous manner the Holy Ghoſt was poured forth on the Gentiles, before he ventured to baptize them: and then, under the aſtoniſhment of this conviction, they held their peace, blaming his behaviour no longer; but glorified God, ſaying, *Then hath God alſo unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*, Acts xi. 18. St. Peter himſelf was equally ſurpriſed, when he found, by comparing Cornelius's viſion with his own, that God had determined to admit the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, into the church of Chriſt; and he expreſſes himſelf in the ſame manner, though not juſt in the ſame words with the Apoſtles and brethren. They ſay, *Then hath God alſo unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.* St. Peter ſays, *Of a truth I perceive that God is no reſpecter of perſons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him.* Theſe two reflections, as they are made upon the ſame caſe, one by St. Peter, when he was with Cornelius, the other by the Apoſtles and brethren, when St. Peter related the ſtory of Cornelius, ſo are they in ſubſtance the ſame: and St. Peter, when he ſays *that in every nation he that fear-*

eth God—is accepted with him, and the Apoſtles and brethren, when they ſay *that God hath granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life*, mean one and the ſame thing: and therefore, in the text, *to be accepted with God* means no more than to have from God the offer of *repentance unto life*; and both certainly mean our having admiſſion into the covenant with God through Chriſt Jeſus. So that the whole of what St. Peter ſays in the text amounts to this: "I now at length perceive that God has "not confined his mercies to a particular nation "only; but that all are capable of inheriting the "promiſes in Chriſt Jeſus, who are duly prepared "by righteouſneſs, and the fear of God."

This will farther appear to be the true interpretation, if we examine the caſe of Cornelius, and what the acceptance was that he found. Cornelius was a Gentile, and one of the beſt of them; *a devout man, and one who feared God with all his houſe, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway:* and yet his goodneſs did not make it unneceſſary for him to become a Chriſtian. The heavenly viſion was not ſent to ſatisfy him that his righteouſneſs was ſufficient, and that he had no need to look out for farther aſſiſtance or direction: on the contrary, it was ſent to inform him where he might ſeek and find a proper inſtructor. St. Peter had alſo a viſion to prepare him to do the duty of an Apoſtle to the Gentile centurion; and, when this devout man came to him, in obedience to the heavenly warning, he inſtructs him in the faith of Chriſt Jeſus, and baptizes him with water: upon which St. Peter ſays, he finds that men of all na-

tions, who do righteouſly, are accepted with God. He could not poſſibly mean, that thoſe who did their beſt upon the light of nature, had no need of any other teacher: that reflection could never riſe from the caſe before him: for why did he then inſtruct Cornelius in the knowledge of Chriſt, and baptize him in his name? St. Peter therefore certainly meant, that all Gentiles duly prepared were capable of the bleſſings of the Goſpel through the mercy of God; in oppoſition to his former error, that none but Jews had ſuch a privilege. And the Apoſtle undoubtedly underſtood that the beſt of the Gentiles had need of the Goſpel; or elſe his commendation of the goodneſs of God amounts to this only, that he perceived that God would give to the honeſt-minded Gentiles, who feared him, and did righteouſly, that which they had no occaſion to receive.

From the words and circumſtances of the text thus explained we learn what is the true notion of that acceptance, which St. Peter ſays the Gentiles of all nations are entitled to through the mercy of God.

But then there ariſes a difficulty from the terms to which St. Peter has limited this privilege; for he does not ſay that men of all nations are accepted of God; but that in every nation *he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs*, is accepted of him. Now, one great end of the Chriſtian religion being to inſtruct us in the fear of God, and in works of righteouſneſs, it may ſeem ſtrange, that in order to the obtaining of this benefit of being duly inſtructed in the fear of God, and in works of righteouſneſs, it

ſhould be required, as a previous condition, that we ſhould fear God, and do righteouſly: which condition ſuppoſes us already in poſſeſſion of the main thing for which the privilege itſelf is granted; and conſequently, the privilege becomes in a manner uſeleſs by our having the qualifications neceſſary to the obtaining it. To clear this matter, we muſt conſider what the Apoſtle to the Hebrews teaches us, chap. xi. 6. *Without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God: for he that cometh to God, muſt believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him.* The meaning of which is, that a man cannot offer himſelf to God, much leſs enter into the covenant of his mercy, without a firm perſuaſion of his being, and a due notion of his attributes. He muſt know *that he is*; otherwiſe he can never move or advance towards him: he muſt know alſo *that he is a rewarder of them who diligently ſeek him*; or elſe he cannot be encouraged to move towards him: which two articles of belief infer a juſt fear of God as the ſupreme governor of the world, and a deſire to pleaſe him as the diſpenſer of rewards and puniſhments according to the good or evil which men do. This is the faith, without which, the Apoſtle to the Hebrews ſays, it is impoſſible to pleaſe God: this is the faith, with which, St. Peter ſays, the men of every nation are accepted with him. And in truth theſe qualifications are ſo neceſſary to a man's being accepted with God, and admitted into the covenant of his grace through Jeſus Chriſt, that without them the Goſpel cannot be ſo much as tendered to him: for upon what foot would you preſs men to become Chriſtians in order to obtain the mercy of God, who

have no ſenſe of the fear of God, and, conſequently, no concern about pleaſing or diſpleaſing him? The Goſpel does not teach, but ſuppoſe this doctrine: and, was even an Apoſtle to preach to a nation perfectly ignorant of God, he muſt lay by the Goſpel, and firſt convince the people from reaſon and nature of the being of God, and the neceſſity of righteouſneſs in order to deſerve his favour, before he could invite them to embrace the Goſpel as the perfect rule of righteouſneſs preſcribed and ordained by God himſelf. And therefore, when St. Peter ſays, *that in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted of him*, he is not to be underſtood as limiting the mercies of God to certain perſons of the beſt character, but rather as declaring the natural order of things. It is frequently taught, that our Lord came to ſave ſinners; and therefore he began his preaching with an exhortation to repentance in the ſame words that John the Baptiſt had done before him, *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand:* which is as much as if he had ſaid, Turn to God, and fear him, working righteouſneſs, that ye may be made members of the kingdom of his Son, which now approaches.

But, ſhould the caſe of Cornelius, *who was a devout man, fearing God with all his houſe, giving much alms, and praying alway*, from which caſe St. Peter makes the reflection contained in the text, incline us to believe that he means a greater degree of goodneſs by fearing God, and working righteouſneſs, than was commonly to be found; and, conſequently, that what St. Peter ſays can be applied only to the moſt virtuous and beſt-diſpoſed heathens; upon

this ſuppoſition, both the caſe of Cornelius, and the declaration of St. Peter, evidently prove, that the beſt of men ſtand in need of the aſſiſtances of the Goſpel of Chriſt to make themſelves ſecure of obtaining the end of their hopes, glory and immortality, from God, who is the rewarder of them who diligently ſeek him. I would deſire thoſe who are of a different opinion, and think that they have no reaſon to trouble their heads about the Chriſtian religion, provided they lead good moral lives, to conſider the character of Cornelius: he was devout, and feared God with all his houſe: he was very charitable, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God continually. This, I ſuppoſe, they will allow to be a deſcription of ſuch a moral man as they mean: and I would aſk then, For what purpoſe did God ſend a viſion to Cornelius, and another to St. Peter, that Cornelius might be made a Chriſtian? Was all this care thrown away upon a mere unneceſſary point, that might as well have been let alone? Was Cornelius thus called to the profeſſion of the Goſpel, and was it of no conſequence whether he had been called, or no? If God made choice of Cornelius, one of the beſt of the Gentiles, to ſhew that ſome of them were capable of his grace, he did at the ſame time demonſtrate that all had need of it: for, if the beſt, with all the light they enjoyed, wanted this aſſiſtance, what could the worſt do without it?

It may be aſked perhaps, What would have become of Cornelius, had he died, as he had ſome time lived, a devout Gentile, in the fear of God, full of alms and of prayers, without having been

called to the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus? which queſtion, if purſued through all its views, would open a large field of diſcourſe, but ſuch as would afford rather ſpeculation than profit; ſince the caſe, however determined, could no way affect us, who have been called to the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus. Let it then be taken for granted, that Cornelius, had he died in the circumſtances before deſcribed, would have found reſt to his ſoul from the mercy and goodneſs of God: and let this other queſtion be conſidered, which is much more to our purpoſe, What would have been the caſe of Cornelius, if he had rejected the call, refuſed to hearken to St. Peter, and had inſiſted on his own merit and virtue, in oppoſition to the grace that was offered him through the Goſpel? Would ſuch a refuſal have been a pardonable error? Could he have maintained the character of one fearing God with all his houſe, after ſuch an open contempt of the divine call? Could he ever have prayed more to God to guide and direct his way, after he had abſolutely denied to be guided and directed by him? Would even his alms have been an acceptable offering to the Almighty, after he had renounced that obedience which is better than ſacrifice, and which is the only thing that can ſanctify our imperfect works? If reaſon and natural religion teach us that it is our duty to pleaſe and to obey God, what part even of natural religion could this Centurion have exerciſed, after he had ſolemnly rejected the counſel of God, and followed his own will in oppoſition to that of his Maker declared in the heavenly viſion? As bad as this ſuppoſed caſe of Cor-

nelius would have been, it is the very caſe of thoſe who, having been betimes inſtructed in the knowledge of the Goſpel, and called to the faith and obedience of Chriſt Jeſus, do deſpiſe and reject that faith under the colour of preſerving the purity of natural religion, and living according to the dictates of reaſon and morality. It makes no difference in the caſe, that their call has been through the ordinary adminiſtrations of the church, and that Cornelius's was by a viſion directed to himſelf: the voice of God is the ſame, whether he ſpeaks by his apoſtles, or by his angels: whoever acts by the appointment of God, ſpeaks with his authority: and, the regular powers of the church being ordained by him, when the church ſpeaks to her children conformably to the commiſſion received, it is the voice of God calling men to repentance unto life through Chriſt Jeſus. And, whatever the condition of thoſe may be who have never heard of the Lord who bought them, ours is certainly very bad, if, having heard of him, we reject and deſpiſe him. It is one thing not to believe in Chriſt, becauſe we know him not; it is another to know him, and to diſbelieve him. Though ſuch ignorance may be an excuſe, yet ſuch knowledge muſt be condemnation.

DISCOURSE XIII.

MATTHEW xxii. 40.

On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

THE two commandments here referred to are ſet down in the verſes immediately preceding the words of the text. At verſe 37 we read, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind. This is the firſt and great commandment*, verſe 38. At verſe 39 follows, *And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* Then come the words of the text, *On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*: the meaning of which ſaying is plainly this, that the whole reaſon of religion lies in theſe two general commandments; that in theſe all particular duties and precepts are founded; that nothing can be of any obligation in religion, but as it relates either to the love we owe to God, or the love we owe to our neighbour. In ſpeaking to theſe words, I ſhall,

Firſt, Shew you the true meaning and import of them; and,

Secondly, Make ſome uſeful remarks on the whole.

In St. Mark's Goſpel the ſame thing is ſaid in different words, though to the ſame effect. The words parallel to the text are theſe: *There is none other commandment greater than theſe*, Mark xii. 31: that is, there is nothing in religion of an higher obligation than theſe two precepts: all the duties of religion muſt be governed by theſe two principles: beyond them there is nothing greater, nothing to limit or reſtrain them; but by them muſt every thing elſe be limited and reſtrained. The reaſon of this is plain: for, the relation between God and man being once known, the firſt concluſion is, *That we ought to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our ſouls, and with all our minds*; that is, to the utmoſt of our power: and, until this general principle be eſtabliſhed, the particular duties owing to God cannot fall under our conſideration. There is no room to inquire after the proper inſtances of expreſſing our love to God, till the general obligation of loving God be known and admitted. The ſame reaſon holds likewiſe as to the other general head of religion, *the love of our neighbour*: for, the relation between man and man, and the common relation of all to one great Maſter, being ſuppoſed, the reſult is, that we ought *to love our neighbour as ourſelf*; that is, to do all we can to promote the happineſs of each other: and, unleſs we have this general ſenſe, we cannot be concerned to know in any particular caſe what is the proper inſtance of love which we ought to ſhew towards our neighbour.

But, theſe general principles being once eſtabliſhed, the particular duties flow from them naturally. The love of God, and the love of our neighbour, if carefully attended to, will eaſily grow into a complete ſyſtem of religion. The duties of religion are all relative, regarding either God or man; and there is no relative duty that love does not readily transform itſelf into upon the mere view of the different circumſtances of the perſons concerned. Love, with regard to a ſuperior, becomes honour and reſpect, and ſhews itſelf in a cheerful obedience and a willing ſubmiſſion to the commands of authority: love, with reſpect to our equals, is friendſhip and benevolence: towards inferiors it is courteſy and condeſcenſion: if it regards the happy and proſperous, it is joy and pleaſure, which envy cannot corrupt: if it looks towards the miſerable, it is pity and compaſſion; it is a tenderneſs which will diſcover itſelf in all the acts of mercy and humanity.

In negative duties this principle is no leſs effectual than in poſitive. Love will not permit us to injure, oppreſs, or offend our brother: it will not give us leave to neglect our betters, or to deſpiſe our inferiors: it will reſtrain every inordinate paſſion, and not ſuffer us either to gratify our envy at the expence of our neighbour's credit and reputation, or our luſt by violating his wife or his daughter; but it will preſerve us harmleſs and innocent: for *love worketh no ill to its neighbour.* This deduction of particular duties from this general principle was made by St. Paul long ſince: *Owe no man,* ſays he, *any thing, but to love one another: for*

he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou ſhalt not commit adultery, Thou ſhalt not kill, Thou ſhalt not ſteal, Thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, Thou ſhalt not covet: and, if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this ſaying, namely, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Rom. xiii. 8, &c.

This notion of love, as being the fulneſs of the law, and of all the commandments being comprehended in this ſaying, *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*, will lead us to the true and natural interpretation of a paſſage in St. James, which, as it is commonly underſtood, is liable to great difficulties and objections, and to thoſe who have plain ſenſe, and can follow it, muſt appear abſurd: *Whoſoever*, ſays he, *ſhall keep the whole law, and offend in one point, he is guilty of all*, chap. ii. ver. 10. This is a poſition ſomething ſtrange, that an offence againſt one law ſhould be a breach of all laws, however different they are in kind and degree; that he who commits adultery, for inſtance, ſhould therefore be guilty of murder and robbery, and other the like heinous offences nothing related to the ſin of adultery. But let us conſider the Apoſtle's reaſon in the next verſe: *For he that ſaid, Do not commit adultery, ſaid alſo, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a tranſgreſſor of the law.* This reaſon, as interpreters commonly expound it, amounts to this: All laws are founded upon one and the ſame authority of God; therefore every offence againſt any law is a contempt of the authority upon which all laws depend;

and therefore every act of disobedience is a breach of the whole law, because subversive of that authority upon which the whole law stands. But there are many objections against the reason thus stated: first, it is liable evidently to all the difficulties of the Stoics' paradox, that all offences are equal: for, if the guilt of sin depends, not upon the nature and circumstances of the sinful action, but upon the authority of the lawgiver, then every sin, being an offence against the same authority, is of the same guilt and heinousness; and there will be no difference between killing your neighbour and your neighbour's horse; for he that has forbid you killing your neighbour, has likewise forbid you doing any act to the hurt and detriment of your neighbour. Secondly, the Apostle's inference in the latter part of the verse does not answer to the principle laid down in the former part: *He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.* This is his principle; and he infers, *Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law:* no doubt of it; because there is a law against murder as well as against adultery. But what is this towards shewing that the breach of one law is the breach of all? The inference therefore should have been upon this foot: now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art guilty of all the laws by disobeying the Author of all laws.

But this passage of St. James will have another appearance, when fairly examined. In order to it, we must look back to that which gave occasion to it, and follow the Apostle's argument step by step.

The whole depends upon the notion, which is common to the writers of the New Teſtament, that *love is the fulfilling of the law.* St. James conſiders the whole duty of man to man as contained in one law, namely, *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf:* and then he argues rightly, he who offends in one point is guilty of the whole law: for, whether it be theft, or murder, or adultery, that you commit, it matters not; for any of theſe crimes is inconſiſtent with the law, which contains and is the whole, *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* But hear the Apoſtle's own words: in the eighth verſe you read thus, *If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf, ye do well:* where, firſt, you are to obſerve, that he calls this the royal law, not becauſe given by Chriſt the king, as ſome tell us, for all laws are in that ſenſe royal laws; but becauſe it is the firſt ſupreme law, from which all others proceed, as diſtinct branches, and by which they muſt all be governed. Secondly, you muſt take notice what ſtreſs the Apoſtle lays upon their *fulfilling* this royal law: *If ye fulfil the royal law,—ye do well:* that is, if you attend to it in all inſtances, ſo as not to offend againſt it in any caſe, ye then will do well. The Apoſtle proceeds in the next verſe, *But, if ye have reſpect to perſons, ye commit ſin, and are convinced of the law as tranſgreſſors.* The law in this verſe is the ſame law that was mentioned before, that is, the royal law: if, ſays he, you have any partial regards, you will not then fulfil the law of love, but will be found to be tranſgreſſors of that law: *for*, as it follows in the tenth verſe, *whoſoever ſhall keep the whole law, and*

offend in one point, he is guilty of all. In this
e he conſiders the royal law, *Thou ſhalt love thy*
hbour as thyſelf, as the whole law; and all par-
lar commandments as points of that law. And
t he ſays amounts to this: Whatever regard you
have to the law of loving your neighbour,
ch all profeſs to walk by, yet aſſure yourſelves
cannot keep that law, if you offend againſt any
rule of charity; for every ſuch ſingle offence is
reach of that whole law, *Thou ſhalt love thy*
hbour as thyſelf. In the eleventh verſe he gives
reaſon of his aſſertion: *For he that ſaid, Do not*
nit adultery, ſaid alſo, Do not kill. The words in
original, here tranſlated *for he that ſaid*, are of
btful interpretation. The ſenſe followed by
rpreters and tranſlators has miſled people in the
lerſtanding of this whole place. Inſtead of *for*
hat ſaid, it ſhould be rendered, for *the law* which
l, *Do not commit adultery, ſaid alſo, Do not kill.*
e place thus rendered contains a clear reaſon of
it went before: if, ſays he, you offend in any
nt of charity or duty, you become a tranſgreſſor
this whole law, *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as*
elf: for this law of loving thy neighbour, which
s to thee, *Do not commit adultery*, ſays likewiſe to
e, *Do not kill.* And now, if you go to the latter
t of the verſe, you will find it exactly ſuited to
whole thread of diſcourſe which went before:
thus it follows, *Now, if thou commit no adultery,*
if thou kill, thou art become a tranſgreſſor of the
; that is, of that general law of loving thy
ghbour, which ſaid as well to thee, *Thou ſhalt*
kill, as, *Thou ſhalt not commit adultery.*

How this royal law ſpeaks to us in the language of all particular laws and precepts is eaſily underſtood, and is diſtinctly explained by St. Paul in the place already produced: *For this, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not kill, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, thou ſhalt not covet: and, if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this ſaying, namely, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*, Rom. xiii. 9.

As to the different verſion of the eleventh verſe in St. James, which I have made choice of, our own tranſlators plainly ſaw the propriety of it, and have given that verſion in the margin of the Bible. To them therefore, and their reaſoning, I refer you.

This place in St. James being thus underſtood and explained, there is no occaſion for any niceties or diſtinctions to ſupport the reaſon and equity of his doctrine, or to ſhew how a man, by offending againſt one law, may become guilty of all; ſince this aſſertion will no longer be found to be part of the Apoſtle's doctrine. What he teaches is plainly this: The great and fundamental law of the Goſpel is this, *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* The force of this all ſee, and all acknowledge; and, whilſt they pretend to be Chriſtians, all muſt pretend at leaſt to obey. But, ſays he, whoever in any manner offends, injures, or oppreſſes his brother, it matters not in what way, whether it be by undue and partial preference of one to another, by contempt, or ſlander, by theft, adultery, or murder: whoever, I ſay, in any of theſe inſtances ſins againſt his brother, will be found to be a tranſgreſſor

t this great, this vital principle of religion, *ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* For this he tells them, the way to do well was *to ful- royal law,* that is, to obſerve all the points of cauſe no point could be tranſgreſſed, but the reffor muſt be found guilty of the whole law, is a general law of love extending to all . There is nothing hard in this ſenſe, no- but what any man may ſee the reaſon of: for. ıly to injure our neighbour in any way makes ilty of the breach of the law, which com- us to love our neighbour; for one injurious is as inconſiſtent with love as another; and reſpect injurious actions have no difference, ey are all equally inconſiſtent with the great

giving light to this paſſage in St. James has ıiſled us from the main purpoſe of this diſ- ; for we have ſeen at the ſame time the true and meaning of the text, with reſpect to one laws referred to in it, and which is eaſily ap- le to the other. St. James has fully taught us ıviour's meaning, when he ſaid, *On theſe two ndments hang all the law and the prophets.*

let us turn to conſider the other general head d to by our Saviour in the text, namely, *the f God. This,* ſays our Lord in the thirty- verſe, *is the firſt and great commandment.* this head are to be deduced all the ſervice, p, and honour, which we owe and pay to our r. I obſerved to you before, that all the of religion are relative: which is true in art now under conſideration; for the duties

we owe to God are founded in the relation between God and us. Were there no ſuch relation, the perfections of God might be matter of admiration, but could not be the ground of duty and obedience. I obſerved likewiſe to you, that love naturally tranſforms itſelf into all relative duties, which ariſe from the circumſtances of the perſons related. Thus, in the preſent caſe, if we love God, and conſider him as the lord and governor of the world, our love will ſoon become obedience: if we conſider him as wiſe, good, and gracious, our love will become honour and adoration: if we add to theſe our own natural weakneſs and infirmity, love will teach us dependence, and prompt us in all our wants to fly for refuge to our great Protector: and thus in all other inſtances may the particular duties be drawn from this general principle. Prayer and praiſe, and other parts of divine worſhip, which are the acts of theſe duties, are ſo clearly connected to them, that there is no need of ſhewing diſtinctly concerning them, how they flow from this general commandment.

Having thus given you an account of the text with reſpect to both the principles of religion referred to in it, *the love of God*, and *the love of our neighbour*, I would now, in the ſecond place, lay before you ſome obſervations which ſeem to ariſe naturally from the whole.

The firſt is, that theſe two principles, from which our Lord tells us all religion flows, muſt be conſiſtent with one another; otherwiſe they could not both be principles of the ſame religion. The love of God therefore can in no caſe oblige us to act

contrary to the love of our neighbour. Our Saviour has told us indeed, that the time would be, when ſome ſhould think they did God good ſervice by deſtroying their brethren: but I do not find the religion or the zeal of thoſe perſons much commended; but this very character is given of them to ſhew how little they knew or underſtood their duty. And yet, could ſuch a caſe ever happen, in which it might become our duty to hurt our neighbour, in order to promote the honour of God, it could not be a juſt character of falſe zeal, to ſay that it made men think they did God good ſervice by deſtroying or abuſing their neighbour; becauſe, upon this ſuppoſition, it might happen to be the character of true religious zeal.

There is one thing in our Saviour's argument which may perhaps miſlead men in judging upon this caſe, and which therefore may deſerve to be particularly conſidered. Of the love of God our Saviour ſays, *it is the firſt and great commandment:* the love of our neighbour he ſtyles *the ſecond, like unto it.* Now from hence perhaps it may be inferred, that the love of God, which is the firſt and great commandment, is a law of a ſuperior obligation to that which is only the ſecond, and may therefore in ſome inſtances control and overrule it. From whence it would follow, that we might lawfully overlook the love of our neighbour, in obedience to the ſuperior obligation we are under to love God. Now, upon ſuppoſition that our duty to God and our neighbour could ever interfere, I ſhould readily allow that we ought to love God rather than man: but our Saviour's ſaying the love

of God is the firſt commandment, is no manner of reaſon to think that it ever is, or can be, inconſiſtent with the ſecond.

The love of God is properly ſtyled the firſt commandment, in reſpect to God who is the object of the love, and becauſe it is indeed the foundation of all religion, even of that commandment which is ſtyled the ſecond. But this is ſo far from ſhewing that the love of God may ever claſh with the love of our neighbour, that it proves the contrary; for, if the love of our neighbour is deducible from the love of God, it muſt ever be conſiſtent with it.

I know very well that the ancient writers of morality have not gone higher for principles to build their precepts on, than to the common deſires of nature, and the ſeveral relations of man to man: but that is their fault; for they might have looked farther with very good ſucceſs: for, if we conſider God as the common father of mankind, and (as from his goodneſs and impartiality we muſt needs judge) equally concerned for the welfare of all his children, we ſhall have a very ſure foundation for all the moral duties. No man, who thinks himſelf bound to love and obey God, can think himſelf at liberty to hurt or oppreſs thoſe whom God has taken under his care and protection: no man, who believes it his intereſt as well as his duty to pleaſe God, but muſt likewiſe believe it his intereſt and duty to be kind and tender towards thoſe who are the children of God, and in whoſe happineſs he is not an unconcerned ſpectator. For this reaſon the love of God is called the firſt and great commandment; and for this reaſon it never can be inconſiſt-

ent with the love of our neighbour, which is the ſecond. In all caſes therefore where your duty to your neighbour is plain and clear, depend upon it your duty to God concurs with it. All ſcruples to the contrary are wicked, perhaps wicked hypocriſy; for it is the greateſt indignity to God to uſe his name, and pretend his honour, to cover the injuries you are doing to his creatures, and your own brethren.

The ſecond obſervation I would make from the text is, that, our Saviour having declared *that on theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*, it is certain that nothing is or ought to be eſteemed religion, that is not reducible to one or other of theſe principles.

But what then, you will ſay, muſt become of the inſtitutions of religion, which, conſidered in themſelves, and according to their own nature, are not properly to be referred either to the love of God, or our neighbour? for, if all that is religion may be ſo referred, it ſhould ſeem that theſe inſtitutions, which cannot be ſo referred, are no part of religion. It is certain that mere poſitive inſtitutions are not founded upon any moral reaſon of the actions themſelves: if they were, they might eaſily be drawn from theſe general precepts without the help of a poſitive command: for the whole moral reaſon of religion is either the love of God, or the love of our neighbour; and to make any thing elſe to be religion, ſtrictly ſpeaking, that does not partake of this moral reaſon, is ignorance and ſuperſtition. But then there is a very manifeſt difference between religion and the means of religion: and what-

ever is part of our religion, and yet not ſo upon the account of the moral reaſon, can only be eſteemed as a means of religion; not ordained for its own ſake, but for the ſake of that religion which is founded upon moral reaſon.

This diſtinction between religion and the means of religion would be of uſe, if carefully attended to; it would teach men where to point their beſt endeavour, and where to place their hopes and expectations: for, if your zeal and fervour be ſpent only upon the means of religion, and goes no farther, ye are ſtill in your ſins.

And from hence it is plain, that there can be no competition between the duties called moral, and thoſe called poſitive: for, if the poſitive duties are the means and inſtruments appointed by God for preſerving true religion and morality, true religion and morality can never be at variance with the means appointed to preſerve them. And, as to the obligation of obſerving theſe duties, it is on all ſides equal: for, ſince we are bound to obey God by all the ties of moral duty, and ſince the inſtitutions of religion are of God's appointment, whatever the matter of the inſtitution be, the obligation to obey is certainly a moral obligation: which, duly conſidered, will ſhew, that the text extends to all parts of religion, and that *on theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

DISCOURSE XIV.

PART I.

HEBREWS iii. 12.

Take heed, brethren, leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

THE words of the text contain an earneſt exhortation, as is evident upon the firſt view: and the ſubject of the exhortation is faith towards God; for faith is the principle deſtroyed by an *evil heart of unbelief.* But faith, as ſome think, is no proper ſubject for exhortation: for, if faith is a mere act of the mind judging upon motives of credibility, it is as reaſonable to exhort a man to ſee with his eyes, as to judge with his underſtanding; and the warmeſt admonition will not enlarge the ſight, which will ſtill depend upon the goodneſs of the eye, and the diſtance and poſition of the object. In faith the caſe is much the ſame: if the affections are throughly raiſed, and made eager to embrace the faith, they may chance indeed to ſtep in between the premiſes and concluſion, and make men profeſs to believe, without knowing or conſidering the reaſons of belief; which is to deſtroy the founda-

tion of faith: or, if they keep their due diſtan
and leave the cauſe to be decided by reaſon and
derſtanding, their influence will be nothing,
they might as well have been left out of the ca
ſince faith will follow the judgment the mind
upon the motives of credibility.

But then, if this be the true notion of faith,
it is merely an act of the mind aſſenting to a
upon motives of credibility, how comes it
every page we find the praiſes of it in the Goſpel?
What is there in this to deſerve the bleſſings
miſed to the faithful? Or, whence is it that
whole of our ſalvation is put upon this foot? Abra-
ham, we are told, *was juſtified by faith, and by*
inherited the promiſes: by faith we become the ſons
Abraham, and heirs together with him of the
which is through Chriſt Jeſus: by faith we have
mittance to God, and are entitled through the Spirit
adoption to cry Abba, Father: by faith we are
vered from the bondage of corruption into the
liberty of the ſons of God: by faith we wait for
adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. But how
come all theſe prerogatives to belong to faith, if
faith be nothing elſe but believing things in them-
ſelves credible? Why are we not ſaid to be juſti-
fied by ſight, as well as by faith? For is there not
the ſame virtue in ſeeing things viſible, as in be-
lieving things credible? Is not the underſtanding
as faulty when it rejects things credible, as the eye
when it does not perceive things viſible? Tell me
then, what is faith, that it ſhould raiſe men above
the level of mortality, and make them become like
the angels of heaven?

But farther; if faith be only an act of the un-
:rſtanding formed upon due reaſons and motives,
ɔw comes it to be deſcribed in Scripture as having
ı ſeat in the heart? The Apoſtle in the text cau-
ɔns againſt *an evil heart of unbelief:* and the ſame
ɔtion prevails throughout the books of Scripture,
ıd is as early as our Saviour's firſt preaching. In
:plaining the parable of the ſower to his diſciples,
uke viii. he tells them, *Thoſe by the way-ſide are
ey that hear: then cometh the devil, and taketh
vay the word out of their hearts, leſt they ſhould be-
ve and be ſaved*, ver. 12. So again, *That on the
ɔd ground are they which in an honeſt and good
art hear the word, and bring forth fruit with pa-
nce*, ver. 15. The firſt ſort are thoſe who had
ı *evil heart of unbelief:* the ſecond are thoſe
ho, as the ſame Apoſtle to the Hebrews expreſſes
, chap. x. had a *true heart in full aſſurance of faith.*
ı the Acts of the Apoſtles, Philip tells the Eunuch,
ıat, if he *believed with all his heart*, he might be
ɑptized, chap. viii. 37. And Barnabas exhorts the
ntiochans, *that with purpoſe of heart they would
eave unto the Lord*; which is only a periphraſis for
ith, chap. xi. 23. The Apoſtle to the Romans
ıs *ex profeſſo* determined this matter: *If thou ſhalt
nfeſs*, ſays he, *with thy mouth the Lord Jeſus, and
alt believe in thine heart that God hath raiſed him
om the dead, thou ſhalt be ſaved*, chap. x. 9. In the
ıllowing verſe he gives this general reaſon for his
ſertion: *For with the heart man believeth unto
ghteouſneſs, and with the mouth confeſſion is made
nto ſalvation.*

Since then the Scripture, read to you for the

text, contains an exhortation to faith, which ſuppoſes a man's faith to be influenced by his affections and inclinations; which is not always true, if we conſider faith merely as the aſſent of the mind to a credible propoſition: ſince there are alſo ſuch things aſcribed to faith in Scripture, ſuch promiſes made to it, as cannot belong to it in this acceptation: ſince faith, thus conſidered, is a bare act of the mind; but the faith of the Goſpel is deſcribed as having its ſeat and operations in the heart of man: it is neceſſary, for the right underſtanding of the text, to inquire,

Firſt, What is the true notion of faith.

From whence, in the ſecond place, it will appear, That it is a proper exhortation, *Take heed, leſt there be in you an evil heart of unbelief.*

The firſt thing to be inquired after is the true notion of faith.

Every ſtep by which we advance to the laſt degree of perfection in faith, is an act of faith, though of a different kind, and not entitled either to the praiſes or rewards of the Goſpel. And hence has ariſen great part of the confuſion which has obſcured and darkened this queſtion concerning faith: for, when men, not diſtinguiſhing between the intermediate acts of faith, and that faith which is the ultimate end and perfection of the Goſpel, aſcribe that to one, which only and properly belongs to the other, no wonder if they are found inconſiſtent with themſelves, and deſtroyers of reaſon and religion, whilſt they ſeem to themſelves to labour for the promotion of the doctrine of righteouſneſs.

To render what I mean plain and intelligible, I

deſire you to conſider the degrees and ſteps of faith by which men arrive at Goſpel righteouſneſs. It is one degree of faith to believe the Goſpels to be true and faithful accounts; and it is a degree that leads to greater perfection: he that wants this faith is at a ſtand, and can never proceed farther. But this is not the faith we ſeek after. It is a farther degree of faith to believe the miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles to be true and real miracles, and wrought by the power and Spirit of God. But neither is this faith complete: for the miracles were wrought, not for their own ſakes, but for the ſake of ſomething elſe: and therefore to believe the miracles, without believing what the miracles were intended to prove, is not Chriſtian faith. Farther ſtill; it is another and a more advanced degree of faith to believe that the Spirit of God was given to the Apoſtles in a large meaſure, and to Chriſt, the author of the ſalvation, without meaſure. But neither is this the faith which Chriſt came to propagate: for, ſhould I aſk you, Why are we taught, and why are we to believe, that God gave the Spirit to his Son without meaſure, and to the diſciples in a very wonderful manner and degree? would you not eaſily anſwer, that theſe heavenly endowments were both given and declared to make them fit teachers, and us ready diſciples, of the doctrines of God? It is evident then, that theſe gifts were ſubſervient to a farther end, and that Chriſtian faith does not terminate here. But if, notwithſtanding this, you will apply all that you read of faith in holy Scripture to theſe or any of theſe kinds of faith, and then imagine that faith is

a very ſtrange principle of religion, and of foreign growth, repugnant to the ſenſe and reaſon of mankind, and diſclaimed by the light of nature; which are the uſual compliments beſtowed on it in the world; you may thank yourſelf for the deluſion: the doctrine of the Goſpel of Chriſt is clear of the reproach.

Faith, which is the principle of the Goſpel, reſpects the promiſes and declarations of God, and includes a ſure truſt and reliance on him for the performance. Beyond this there is no farther act of faith. We are not taught to believe this in order to our believing ſomething elſe: but here faith has its full completion, and leads immediately to the practice of virtue and holineſs, the conditions in which all the promiſes of God are founded. For this end was the Son of God revealed, to make known the will of his Father, to declare his mercy and pardon, and to confirm the promiſes of eternal life to mankind: he that believes and accepts this deliverance from the bondage of ſin, and through patience and perſeverance in well-doing waits for the bleſſed hope of immortality; who paſſes through this world as a ſtranger and pilgrim, looking for another country, and a city whoſe builder is God; this is he whoſe faith ſhall receive the promiſe, whoſe confidence ſhall have great recompence of reward.

If theſe are hard ſayings, what defence ſhall we make for natural religion, which requires almoſt the ſame faith, but without giving the ſame evidence? Is it not the profeſſion of every religion to believe God to be a rewarder of them who diligently ſeek

m? Could you have any natural religion without is principle? This the Goſpel requires of you: d, if Jeſus Chriſt has given you more evidence r this faith than ever nature could afford her ildren, forgive him this injury. Is it become s credible that God will reward the righteous, beuſe he has ſent his Son into the world to declare s full purpoſe ſo to do? Is it harder to truſt him w, ſince he has appeared to us in ſigns and in nders and in mighty works, than it was before, hen we ſaw him only by the glimmering light of ture? Are the expreſs promiſes of God, conmed to us in Chriſt Jeſus, of leſs weight than the neral ſuggeſtions of nature? If theſe expreſs proiſes, theſe clear evidences of the purpoſe of God e not the things complained of in the Goſpel, hat are they? Faith has ever been the principle of ligion, and muſt ever continue ſo to be: for, when l other gifts ſhall ceaſe, faith, hope, and charity, ill be the only Goſpel graces which time ſhall not eſtroy.

Religion is a ſtruggle between ſenſe and faith. he temptations to ſin are the pleaſures of this e: the incitements to virtue are the pleaſures of e next. Theſe are only ſeen by faith: thoſe are e objects of every ſenſe. On the ſide of virtue, l the motives, all the objects of faith engage: on e ſide of vice ſtand the formidable powers of ſenſe, ſſion, and affection. Where the heart is eſtaiſhed in the fulneſs of faith, the heavenly hoſt evails, and virtue triumphs over all the works of rkneſs: but, where ſenſe governs, ſin enters, and ſerved by every evil paſſion of the heart. If this

be the caſe; if religion has nothing to oppoſe to the preſent allurements of the world, but the hopes and glories of futurity, which are ſeen only by faith; it is no more abſurd to ſay men are ſaved by faith, than it is to ſay they are ruined by ſenſe and paſſion; which we all know has ſo much of truth in it, that it can have nothing of abſurdity.

To this account of faith the definition which the Apoſtle has given of it (in the eleventh chapter to the Hebrews) exactly agrees: *Now faith is the ſubſtance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not ſeen.* *Things hoped for* are the things of futurity, things which are not ſeen, as we learn from St. Paul, Romans viii. 24. *We are ſaved by hope: but hope that is ſeen is not hope: for what a man ſeeth why doth he yet hope for?* Now without faith there can be no hope: for, if we do not believe things future, we cannot poſſibly hope for them. Hope therefore is indebted to faith for all its objects: for theſe things with reſpect to hope would be mere non-entities, were it not for faith. Conſidered therefore as things hoped for, they owe their ſubſtance and their being to faith. *Faith* then *is the ſubſtance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not ſeen.* *The things not ſeen* are thoſe good things which God has prepared for them who love him, the rewards of virtue and holineſs, which eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither hath the heart of man conceived. And that theſe things are chiefly meant by the Apoſtle, is evident from the great number of inſtances ſubjoined in this chapter, in which the thing not ſeen is generally the promiſe of God, that is, the thing promiſed by God. Now, the promiſes of God

being neither objects of ſenſe nor ſcience, but ſuch things as are made known to us by his declaration, the evidence upon which they are received is the evidence of faith. The reaſon why we believe here are ſuch rewards, is, becauſe we believe the word of God: the reaſon why we hope to receive them, is, becauſe we judge *him faithful who has promiſed.*

Since then all the bleſſings of holineſs, all the hopes of religion, are founded in faith, is it not very natural to ſay, that the man who follows after holineſs and piety, induced by the glorious proſpects of futurity, is ſaved by faith? that he who ſacrifices the world and its enjoyments to the hopes of eternity, depending entirely upon the truth of God, that he will perform the word which is gone out of his mouth, is ſaved by his faith, without which he could have had no hopes, no expectations, to place againſt the preſent enjoyments of the world? Do but conſider the poſture of mind a man is in, when he deliberates upon the good and evil of his own actions, and is determining his choice whether to follow the pleaſures of ſin, or to endure the hardſhips and fatigues of virtue: What are his motives, what are his deliberations? Is not the whole conteſt between things preſent and things to come, the realities of this life, and the uncertainty of the other? Moſt certainly this is the whole debate: for, put the things of this life and the next upon the ſame foot of certainty and reality, and there is no man fool enough to deliberate on his choice. Were the glories of heaven the object of ſenſe; could we with the eyes of fleſh look up to

the throne of God, the heavenly Jeruſalem, and *diſcern the innumerable company of angels, the general aſſembly and church of the firſt-born, which are written in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, and Jeſus the mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of ſprinkling, that ſpeaketh better things than that of Abel:* could we have this view, a man would no more part with his inheritance above for the ſhort enjoyments of ſin, than he would ſell the reverſion of an earthly crown for one morſel of meat. The cauſe of ſin therefore is never argued upon the compariſon between the glories of heaven, and the pleaſures of life. No wicked man was ever ſo weak as to ſay, it is better for me to eat, drink, and be merry this day and the next, than to reign in eternal glory and immortality. But thus he reaſons, The things about me are preſent and real: I ſee, I feel the world; and every ſenſe directs me to the enjoyment of it: but for heaven, where is it? Diſtant it is, I am ſure, and out of ſight; and perhaps is only a deluſion of ſickly imagination. When this reaſoning prevails, as too often it does, tell me, I beſeech you, is it not a victory gained by ſenſe over the power of faith? Had faith been ſtrong enough to have placed in view the ſubſtance of things hoped for, to have made evident the things not ſeen, could the world ſo eaſily have prevailed? I truſt, it could not; for the things of faith as much excel the things of ſenſe, as the heavens are higher than the earth. But, where faith is not ſtrong enough to make a competition between the things of futurity and the preſent pleaſures, the world muſt triumph, and the ſinner will be loſt for want

of faith. On the other ſide, what is it that makes men willingly endure afflictions and perſecutions? Do you think the righteous man ſo very ſilly, as not to know that pleaſure is better than pain, eaſe and tranquillity to be preferred to vexation and torment? Can you imagine that he chooſes oppreſſion for oppreſſion's ſake? No certainly: but his faith, his truſt and confidence in God, make him eſteem the promiſes of God as if they were preſent before his eyes; to the hopes of them he ſacrifices the world; and, after the example of his great Maſter, the author and finiſher of our faith, *for the joy that is ſet before him, endures the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame.* Thus Moſes by faith, when he was come to years, refuſed to be called the ſon of Pharaoh's daughter, *chooſing rather to ſuffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin for a ſeaſon.* Mark the reaſon which follows, and the power of his faith: *eſteeming the reproach of Chriſt greater riches than the treaſures in Egypt: for he had reſpect unto the recompence of reward. By faith alſo he forſook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.* But what confidence was this? What forces, what allies, had he to ſupport him againſt the united ſtrength of Egypt? Thus ſenſe indeed would reaſon. But *through faith he endured, as ſeeing him who is inviſible:* though he had no viſible protector, yet through faith he ſaw the hand of God ſtretched out for his deliverance. This was his confidence, this his ſupport.

Towards the cloſe of this eleventh chapter the Apoſtle ſings the triumphs of faith under all the cruelties of men: *Others*, ſays he, *were tortured*;

and others had trial of cruel mockings and ſcourgings, yea moreover of bonds and impriſonments: they were ſtoned, they were ſawn aſunder, were tempted, were ſlain with the ſword; they wandered about in ſheep-ſkins and goat-ſkins, being deſtitute, afflicted, tormented. All theſe perſiſted in faith, *not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better reſurrection.* The reſurrection was a ſtate they had never ſeen; it was what they could only hope for: but the promiſe of God was to them more than the evidence of ſight; and to their truſt and confidence in him they willingly gave up all that their eyes beheld, and ſubmitted to the evils, which ſenſe is ever warning us againſt.

From this account it will be eaſy to underſtand what the Scripture means, when it tells us *that faith overcometh the world:* for religion is a conteſt between the world and faith, between things preſent and things to come. Faith puts us under the conduct of future hopes and fears, exempts us from the power and influence of things preſent; which preſent things are the world: and therefore it is properly ſaid of faith, *that it overcometh the world.*

To this notion of faith agrees likewiſe what St. Paul had ſaid concerning it in his compariſon between faith, hope, and charity, and other ſpiritual gifts, ſuch as ſpeaking with tongues, propheſying, and healing of diſtempers. Theſe ſhall ceaſe: *But now remaineth,* ſays the Apoſtle, *faith, hope, and charity; and the greateſt of theſe is charity:* for charity and univerſal benevolence is the very grace and ornament of heaven, the employment and the pleaſure of bleſſed ſpirits. Nor can faith and hope ever

be parted from true religion: for there is no being ſo great as not to depend on faith in God, and truſt in his power and wiſdom, or to be above hoping any thing from his goodneſs and benevolence. And therefore the Apoſtle ſays expreſsly of faith and hope, that they ſhall remain, with charity, the greateſt of the three. Other gifts are beſtowed for the ſervice of the Church, ſuch as tongues, miracles, and the like; and they may well ceaſe, when the occaſion which required them ceaſes: but faith, hope, and charity are not occaſional gifts, but are eſſential to religion, and muſt continue as long as religion itſelf.

From this account we may perceive likewiſe how the heart comes to have ſuch an intereſt and influence in the faith of a Chriſtian. It is the love of the world that is the enemy of faith: and is not the heart of man the very magazine from which the world ſupplies itſelf with arms? Where dwell ſelf-love, luſt, envy, and covetouſneſs, are not theſe the evil treaſure of an evil heart? and are not theſe the fierceſt combatants againſt faith? and may not an heart thus ſtocked be properly ſtyled *an heart of unbelief?*

In other matters of faith, which ſeem to be of a more abſtracted nature, and to depend entirely on the reaſon and judgment of men, the heart often interpoſes with too much ſucceſs: for theſe are ſo nearly related to the faith which ſubdues the world and the heart, that the heart, watchful for itſelf and the world, diſturbs the mind, and raiſes ſuch clouds of paſſion, as intercept the light of truth. To believe Chriſt to be the Son of God, to have dwelt

for ever in the glory of his Father, from thence to have come to our redemption, and to have publiſhed the faith in ſigns and wonders and mighty works, are ſuch killing blows to the love of the world, that the heart cannot be unconcerned whilſt theſe things are debating: and, though they can only be tried at the bar of reaſon, yet the heart will be counſel on one ſide or other: and even in theſe caſes there is reaſon to remember the apoſtolical admonition, *Take heed, leſt there be in you an evil heart of unbelief.*

DISCOURSE XIV.

PART II.

I PROCEED to conſider the character given in the text of an unbelieving heart; namely, that it makes us *depart from the living God.* What may be proper to be ſaid on this ſubject may be reduced, I think, under theſe three heads:

Firſt, to ſhew, That it is for want of faith, conſidered as a principle of religion, that men *depart from the living God.*

Secondly, That faith cannot be a principle of religion, until it has its effects and operations in the heart.

Thirdly, That the motions and operations of the heart are in great meaſure under our own power and government.

And from hence it will evidently appear, how much it is the buſineſs and concern of a religious life to be watchful over the heart, to guard againſt all ſuch affections as will deſtroy the influence of faith, and render the heart uncapable of receiving the impreſſions of the Spirit of God.

Firſt then, we are to ſhew, That it is for want of faith, conſidered as a principle of religion, that men *depart from the living God.* What is meant by *departing from God*, will appear by comparing this with other equivalent expreſſions made uſe of in this chapter. In the eighth verſe the Apoſtle introduces the Holy Ghoſt ſpeaking in the language of the Pſalmiſt, and thus forewarning the people, *Harden not your hearts.* In the tenth verſe God complains of the rebellious Iſraelites in the wilderneſs, ſaying, *They do always err in their hearts, and they have not known my ways.* In the verſe immediately after the text the Apoſtle thus explains his meaning: *But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* So then, to be hardened in heart, to err in heart, not to know or walk in the ways of God, to be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin, are one and the ſame thing as departing from the living God: and the meaning of theſe figurative expreſſions is clearly explained at the ſeventeenth verſe: *But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had ſinned?* As ſinners are ſaid *to depart from God*, ſo thoſe who forſake ſin, and are converted, are ſaid, in the language of Scripture, to *turn to God.* Of the holy Baptiſt, who came preaching repentance from dead works, it was foretold, that he *ſhould turn many to the Lord their God*, Luke i. 16. And the apoſtles Paul and Barnabas thus deſcribe the purpoſe and end of their miſſion: *We preach unto you, that ye ſhould turn from theſe vanities unto the living God*, Acts xiv. 15.

The propriety of theſe expreſſions will appear, if

we conſider God, under the repreſentation made of him by our Saviour in the parable of the prodigal, as the Father of the family; and ſinners as prodigal ſons, who, weary of their Father's government, forſake his houſe, and, reduced by luxury and riot, enter into the ſervice of ſtrange maſters, till the ſenſe of want and their own miſery brings them back to beg admittance again into their Father's houſe. Thus the nations of old forſook the ſervice of God, their heavenly Father, and fell under the hard bondage of ſtrange deities: they were apoſtates from him who had a right to their obedience, and ſlaves to thoſe who had no dominion over them: when they received the Goſpel, it was not putting themſelves under a new maſter, but returning to their old one, and yielding that obedience which was always due, though never paid before. Since therefore by faith in the Goſpel of Chriſt we become the ſervants of the living God, and are once more entered into his family, it is eaſy to apprehend the reaſon why the Apoſtle in the text charges an unbelieving heart with apoſtaſy from the living God: for, if Chriſtian faith be the principle by which we are united to the living God, whatever deſtroys this principle does at the ſame time diſſolve the union; and we cannot make ſhipwreck of the faith without departing from God. An unbelieving heart therefore, that is, an heart void of Chriſtian faith, is guilty of apoſtaſy.

But you may aſk perhaps, May not the heart poſſibly depart from God through the ſolicitations of vice and pleaſure, and faith at the ſame time ſtand ſound and uncorrupted? And there is this ground

for putting the queſtion, that we ſee many men who are buried in wickedneſs, whoſe life is but one continued ſcene of guilty enjoyments, who ſacrifice their honour, their faith, and their religion, to luſt, covetouſneſs, or intemperance; who yet profeſs to believe all the doctrines of the Goſpel, and do really believe them, for aught that any man knows to the contrary. But, when I reflect upon the expreſs declarations of the Goſpel, *that every one who believeth ſhall be ſaved, that all the workers of iniquity ſhall be deſtroyed*; if theſe characters can ſubſiſt together, if the ſame perſon at the ſame time may be both a believer and a worker of iniquity, there is a greater contradiction in the Goſpel than any that has yet been pretended by its keeneſt enemies.

How muſt we then account for this difficulty? The true anſwer, I think, is, that the difficulty ariſes from confounding and blending together ideas which are perfectly diſtinct, from not ſeparating between faith conſidered as a principle of knowledge, and as a principle of religion. In common life we know many things upon the evidence of faith: ſuch are the things which we receive upon the authority of hiſtorical evidence, or upon the report and teſtimony of credible witneſſes: and ſuch influence has this principle of knowledge in the world, that there is hardly any thing of conſequence that is not determined by it. There is not a trial that affects either our lives or our fortunes, the iſſue of which does not depend upon this principle of knowledge, the judge and the jury not being ſuppoſed to have the evidence of their own ſenſes of the facts which come under their determination. I mention this to

put it out of diſpute that faith is one of the ſources or principles of our knowledge. Now mere ſpeculative knowledge has nothing in it of moral good or evil: a man is not better or worſe for what he knows, till he comes to act, or to be influenced to action by his knowledge. Bare knowledge therefore is nothing akin to religion; for religion is not one of thoſe very indifferent things, which has neither good nor evil in it. The ſpeculative knowledge therefore of truths depending upon divine teſtimony is mere knowledge, and not religion: for there is no difference in the ſimple act of the mind, whether the aſſent be grounded upon divine teſtimony, or human teſtimony; unleſs you think that every thing muſt be religion, that depends upon our belief of the being of God: which is not true; becauſe there may be this belief, where there can be no religion; for St. James has told us, *that the devils believe and tremble.* Now the wicked man's faith can be nothing more but this ſpeculative knowledge or belief of divine truths: for it is evident it has no effect, no influence; and is therefore ſo far from being the ſaving faith of the Goſpel, that it is not in any degree religious. Our Lord in the Goſpel has given us a ſhort deſcription of religion, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy ſoul, and thy neighbour as thyſelf.* Now, in order to love God, we muſt know him, and his attributes; in order to love our neighbour, we muſt know our neighbour, and his condition: and there is juſt as much religion in knowing God without loving and obeying him, as there is in knowing our neighbour without loving or regarding him. The man who

believes God, and pretends to a right faith in divine matters, and lives in the neglect of God, in contempt of his commands, and ſins in defiance of knowledge, has juſt as much faith, as the Prieſt and the Levite had charity, who ſaw their neighbour ſtripped and wounded, and lying half-dead in the road, and *looked on him, and paſſed by on the other ſide.* The knowledge of God is but like other natural knowledge, as long as it has its reſidence in the head only: to become a principle of religion, it muſt deſcend into the heart, and teach us to *love the Lord with all our minds, with all our ſouls, and with all our ſtrength:* and if this be true of the knowledge of God, which is the firſt and greateſt of all divine truths, it muſt be true in all other inſtances whatever. The faith then of the Goſpel, and which the wicked man is an utter ſtranger to, is that faith which makes us *cleave ſteadfaſtly to the Lord with full purpoſe of heart.* And this will farther appear under the ſecond head, which was to ſhew,

Secondly, That faith cannot be a principle of religion, till it has its effect and operation in the heart. If we conſider religion under the notion of action, this propoſition has, I think, nothing ſtrange or ſurpriſing in it: for it is not only true of faith, but of every principle of knowledge and action: it is altogether as true of ſenſe, as it is of faith. As faith makes us cleave to God, ſo ſenſe makes us cleave to the world: but, till ſenſe has poſſeſſion of the heart, it has no power or efficacy, and is of no uſe and ſervice to the world. We learn from ſenſe the exiſtence and reality of things temporal: but this aſſent of the mind to the evidence of ſenſe

never made any man wicked or worldly-minded: for, if it did, no man would ever be righteous; for the beſt man that ever was in the world had his knowledge of external things from the evidence of ſenſe. But, when ſenſe ſtirs the deſires and affections of the heart, then it becomes a principle of action, and a fierce combatant for the world againſt the powers of faith. If we remember what was ſaid of the wicked man with regard to his faith and perſuaſion about divine truths, we ſhall find how exactly the righteous man is in the ſame caſe in reſpect to ſenſible things: as the wicked man has the knowledge of faith, but nothing religious, ſo has the righteous man all the knowledge of ſenſe, but nothing ſenſual: the difference therefore between a ſenſual man and a righteous man does not conſiſt in this, that one knows moſt of ſenſible things, and the other moſt of divine things, for this in both caſes may be, and often is, falſe; but it lies in this, that one purſues the objects of ſenſe, the other the objects of faith.

To trace this parallel between ſenſe and faith a little farther may give us perhaps a true conception of the nature of faith, the thing we ſeek after. Let us conſider then how the caſe ſtands between ſenſe and faith, things preſent and things to come, between ſenſuality and religion. The deſires which God has planted in our nature, are the ſprings of action; and we always propoſe the obtaining ſome end, which is the object of ſome deſire, in every thing we do. It is evident then, that, where there is nothing to move and incite our deſires, we muſt be unconcerned and inactive. All objects of our

deſires are firſt objects of the underſtanding, according to the known ſaying of the poet, *ignoti nulla cupido*. But there are many objects of the mind which are never objects of the paſſions; for the mind muſt not only apprehend the thing, but likewiſe apprehend it as a real thing, and as having the relation of good or evil to a man, before it can have any effect upon our inclinations. From this account it is plain, that to make a man perform the actions either of religion or of common life, his deſires, which are the ſprings of action, muſt be moved: and ſince nothing can move the deſires, which is not firſt the object of the underſtanding, he muſt have the knowledge of the things of this life, and of religion, and conſider them under the notion of good or evil with reſpect to himſelf.

Now the enjoyment of the things of this world is the buſineſs and employment of the ſenſual man: the good things of futurity and another life are the religious man's care and concern. As the objects are of different kinds, ſo the means of obtaining the knowledge of the objects are likewiſe different. Things preſent are repreſented to our minds by every ſenſe; the things of futurity by no ſenſe: and in this ſingle point lies the great advantage which the world has over religion. The world has as many ways of making itſelf familiar to us, as we have ſenſes: religion has only the dark glimpſe of futurity, ſuch as reaſon, in its preſent feeble and low condition, can diſcover. The only thing then that is wanting to ſet religion upon as good a foot as the world, and to make it able to bear up againſt

the impreſſions of ſenſe, is a certain principle of knowledge with reſpect to the objects of religion: for, could we as evidently poſſeſs ourſelves of the reality of the things of another life, as we are poſſeſſed of the reality of the things of this, there would be no more competition between ſenſe and religion, than there is compariſon between the things of this life and of eternity. To ſupply this darkneſs of our knowledge in religion is the very end and deſign of revelation: for, could we as plainly diſcern the good things of futurity, as we ſee and feel the good things preſent, there would be no more want of revelation to make us acquainted with the other world, than there is to make us acquainted with this. Now, as ſenſe is evidently to be diſtinguiſhed into a principle of knowledge, and a principle of action, ſo is faith likewiſe. We never eſteem a man to be ſenſual or worldly-minded, merely becauſe ſenſe has furniſhed him with a comprehenſive knowledge of ſenſible objects: ſo neither is a man to be accounted a religious man, becauſe of that faith which flows from revelation, conſidered merely as a principle of religious knowledge. This diſtinction between ſenſe as a principle of knowledge, and a principle of action, may be ſeen in any or in every inſtance. An honeſt man knows the uſe and value of riches, as well as a thief. It is not therefore the knowledge of the object, but the immoderate deſire of it, that makes the difference: and one man may be juſtly hanged for ſtealing five pounds, and another be very innocent who had ſeen and examined the value of the mines of Peru. In religion the caſe is juſt the

ſame: faith, as long as it continues to be a mere object of the mind, is no principle of religion; and one is no more a religious man for knowing the articles of religion, than he is a ſenſual man for walking with his eyes open and ſeeing the world. An unbelieving heart is the ſame thing in faith, that an antipathy is in ſenſe, and ſuppoſes us rather to hate than not to know our duty. Many men are ruined by the love of wine and ſtrong liquors. Stop but the paſſage to the heart, and theſe objects loſe all their force and power, and a man ſees the wine ſparkle with leſs concern than he ſees the moon ſhine. And this is the caſe of all thoſe who have a natural averſion to ſtrong drinks, which is no uncommon caſe. This averſion affects ſenſe only as it is a principle of action, and leaves it free as it is the principle of knowledge: and in like manner, the unbelieving heart deſtroys that faith which is the life and principle of religion, though it may not, perhaps, diſturb the objects of faith, which have their reſidence in another place.

Upon the whole then; ſince religion is not a mere ſcience and ſpeculation, but is to be the work and employment of our lives, and to exert itſelf in the love of God and our neighbour, as our bleſſed Saviour has taught us; ſince the knowledge of any thing, or the belief of any thing, conſidered merely as acts of the mind, are no principles of action; but every action propoſes to itſelf ſome end, which is the object of ſome deſire; it evidently follows, that faith cannot be a principle of religion, till it becomes the object of our deſires, that is, till it has its effects and operations in the heart. This notion

of faith is not only probable, but neceſſary, upon the view of our own nature, and the origin of all our actions, which ariſe in the ſame manner, whatever the principle of action be. Even ſenſe works in the ſame manner, and, powerful as it is, has no effect, till it has made its way to the heart, the ſeat of all our paſſions and affections. There, and there only, it prevails as a principle of action. Senſe produces no ſenſuality, till it warms the affections with the pleaſures of the world; and faith produces no religion, till it raiſes the heart to love and to embrace its Maker.

The great advantage the world has over religion lies in the certainty and reality of its objects, which flow in upon us at every ſenſe. To ſupply this defect on the part of religion, revelation was given to aſſure us of the certainty and reality of things future; without which aſſurance they could have no effect or influence on our affections. The objects of faith then ſupport religion in the ſame manner as the objects of ſenſe promote and encourage the love of the world: and, as there could be no ſenſual love of the world, if there were no objects of ſenſe; ſo neither could there be any religion, where there are no articles of faith: for as, in general, there can be no deſire, where there is no knowledge; ſo, in particular, there can be no principle of faith, where there are no objects of faith.

All the articles of the Goſpel tend to one of theſe ends, either to aſſure us of the certainty of the revelation and redemption by Chriſt Jeſus, or to ſet before us the very ſubſtance and image of the

things hoped for. For this laſt purpoſe our Lord roſe viſibly from the grave, to give us the very evidence of ſenſe for that part of our faith, which ſeemed to be moſt contradictory to the experience of ſenſe. For the firſt purpoſe, to aſſure us of the certainty of the revelation and redemption by Chriſt Jeſus, *our Lord was declared to be the only-begotten Son of God, the brightneſs of his Father's glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon; by whom the worlds were made, and who upholdeth all things by the word of his power*; that we, knowing in whom we have truſted, might hold faſt the confidence *and profeſſion of our faith without wavering: (for he is faithful that promiſed.)* When Chriſt was declared by the voice out of the cloud to be the Son of God, the ſame voice gave the reaſon of the declaration; *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him*, Luke xvii. 5. To reject therefore theſe articles of the Goſpel, is to reject the revelation and the redemption of Chriſt, and to ſet out purely on the foot of natural religion. How reaſonably you may do this, and how well it becomes your condition, the time will not permit me now to ſhew.

Theſe objects of faith are our motives and incitements to holineſs and righteouſneſs; and, if we ſuffer them to have their due influence on our hearts, they produce that faith, which is the life and ſpirit of a Chriſtian, which unites him to God, and will entitle him to glory at the great day. How far it is in our power to promote or obſtruct this influence, will appear under the laſt head, which was to ſhew,

Thirdly, That the motions and operations of the heart are in great meaſure under our own power and government.

I ſhall not ſpend much of your time in a plain caſe, and in which every man's own experience is his beſt inſtructor. We find daily, that we can check our paſſions and inclinations, to ſerve the purpoſes of this life; and, if we would do as much for that which is to come, we ſhould anſwer all that the Apoſtle in the text requires of us, when he exhorts us to *take heed of an evil heart of unbelief.* Were it not in our power to ſuſpend the influence of our paſſions, man would have no more freedom or liberty than a ſtone, and would, conſequently, be utterly incapable of religion. It is not in our power to feel, or not to feel, the impreſſions of ſenſe: our eyes, our ears, and every ſenſe, preſent before us the objects of the world, whether we will, or no; and, if theſe objects can as uncontrollably take poſſeſſion of our hearts, as they do of our minds and imaginations, all men muſt as neceſſarily follow the dictates of ſenſe, as they admit the objects of ſenſe: which would deſtroy, not only the power of faith, but all moral virtue, all diſtinction of good and evil. But this is not the caſe: for, though we cannot ſee things as we will, yet it is in our power to purſue and court them as we pleaſe: we can ſupple our inclinations, and make them yield to our will; as is evident in the many inſtances where men ſacrifice their preſent enjoyments to the diſtant proſpects of honour or preferment: for the future things of this life are no more the objects of ſenſe than the things of another life; and

it is not ſenſe, but judgment, that refuſes the preſent good for a diſtant advantage: and it is but an inſtance of the ſame reaſon and judgment to reſtrain the ſenſual appetites, and to make room for the hopes of immortality to enter in and poſſeſs the heart; and this is truly the work of religion. God has placed before us life and death, things preſent and things to come. If things temporal have this advantage, that *they are ſeen*; yet the things which are not ſeen have this prerogative to balance that advantage, that *they are eternal.* The truth of theſe things is founded both on reaſon and on the teſtimony of God. If we receive his teſtimony, it is well: but, if we intereſt our hearts in the cauſe, and act as men reſolved to ſecure to themſelves theſe bleſſed hopes, then is our faith made perfect. And, ſince this depends upon the due regulation of our deſires, which are ſubject to the will and judgment of man, it is plain that the true Chriſtian faith is an internal principle, a religious habit and diſpoſition of ſoul, which, like other good habits, depends upon the care we take to preſerve the innocence and purity of our hearts and minds. And this ſufficiently ſhews the reaſonableneſs and the ſenſe of the Apoſtle's exhortation in the text, *Take heed, leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.*

DISCOURSE XV.

ACTS xv. 1, 2.

And certain men, which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and ſaid, Except ye be circumciſed after the manner of Moſes, ye cannot be ſaved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no ſmall diſſenſion and diſputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, ſhould go up to Jeruſalem, unto the apoſtles and elders, about this queſtion.

WE learn from the text, and other parts of holy writ, that the earlieſt and pureſt times of the Goſpel were not free from diſputes and controverſies in religion: that the authority of the Apoſtles, though confirmed by ſigns and wonders, was not ſufficient to lay the heats and prejudices of men; which, like ancient inhabitants, having poſſeſſion and preſcription to plead for their right, were with great difficulty removed: that the Apoſtles themſelves, however agreed in one and the ſame doctrine, were of different opinions as to the prudential methods of dealing with the oppoſition they found; ſome giving way to the torrent, that men might have time to cool, and recover the calmneſs of reaſon and judgment; others endeavouring reſolutely to ſtem the tide, and not to give way, *no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Goſpel might continue.* Hence

aroſe the conteſt between Peter and Paul; ſo that, as the Apoſtle of the Gentiles himſelf tells us, *he withſtood Peter to the face.*

To the ſame cauſe likewiſe we may aſcribe much of the preſent difficulty and obſcurity of the books of the New Teſtament: for the writers being neceſſarily drawn into controverſy by this means, which always has, and in the nature of the thing muſt have, reference to the opinions and prejudices of the diſputers; there are many things in Scripture which appear dark to us, for want of a diſtinct knowledge of the errors and miſconceits which the writers oppoſe; many things delivered down to us, in which it is not eaſy, at firſt ſight, to diſtinguiſh how far the holy Penman argues upon the truth of our common Chriſtianity, and how far upon the principles and conceſſions of his adverſary. From whence it has come to paſs, that ſome things have been taught by unſkilful interpreters of Scripture, as the doctrines of Chriſtianity, which were no better than the errors of judaizing converts.

Theſe difficulties, thus woven into the holy writings, have furniſhed even to learned men conſtant matter of diſpute and controverſy; and ſome points have laboured under a difference of opinion in moſt ages of the Church: and ſo far has length of time been from diminiſhing theſe diſputes, that every writer of name and authority has enlarged this field of controverſy; and to examine, adjuſt, and expound the ſentiments and opinions of men of renown in the Church of God, who have gone before us, is left as an additional labour and ſtudy, and oftentimes as a freſh matter of contention.

Add to theſe cauſes already recited, the paſſions, the weakneſſes, and prepoſſeſſions of mind, which the beſt men are not free from; and which darken and obſcure things in themſelves oftentimes clear and intelligible; and you will have before you, perhaps, a juſt account of the cauſes which have filled the world with ſo many doubts and differences in opinion concerning the weightieſt matters of religion.

But ſince from this account there appears little hope of coming to an entire harmony and agreement of opinion, what muſt an honeſt man do? Whom ſhall he chooſe to follow? And, when he has choſen, with what ſecurity and confidence can he proceed? ſince there will be always ſome to tell him, that he is a blind follower of a blind leader. How far this difficulty has been preſſed, even to the rendering all religion precarious and uncertain, and to the diſcarding the Goſpel itſelf, which is repreſented as encumbered with ſo many doubts, ſuch different comments and expoſitions, that the wit of man knows not how to extricate him from this labyrinth, and lead him to one ſpot of firm ground, whereon to reſt the ſole of his feet; how far, I ſay, this argument has been urged to this purpoſe, I need not ſay: it will be more to our purpoſe to call this matter to a fair examination, and to aſſert the grounds and principles of our faith, notwithſtanding this fierce aſſault that has been made upon them.

Now there are two things which this argument leads us to conſider; and which, when fairly ſtated, will, I think, exhauſt the whole difficulty.

The firſt is with reſpect to the revelation itſelf;

to conſider how far theſe difficulties affect the authority of the Goſpel: for if it is, as it is repreſented, ſo very dark and obſcure, that common honeſty, with the aſſiſtance of common ſenſe, cannot diſcern in it what is the will of God; then it cannot be a rule or meaſure of religion, or deſigned as ſuch by God, who is too wiſe and too good to give laws to the world, which can be of no uſe to them, but to perplex and confound their underſtandings.

The ſecond is with reſpect to ourſelves; to conſider how we may attain to a certain rule of religion under the Goſpel revelation, notwithſtanding the many controverſies and diſputes, which are too viſible to be denied, and oftentimes too fierce to be excuſed.

And if it ſhall appear upon the whole, that theſe difficulties do not affect the authority of the Goſpel, nor preclude us from the certain knowledge of the faith and obedience required under the Goſpel; then, whatever uſe may be made of theſe controverſies, they cannot in reaſon be urged as objections againſt revealed religion, the certainty of which, either as to its authority, or the clearneſs of its doctrines, is no way impeached by them.

The firſt thing is, to conſider the authority of revelation, and how it is affected by any difficulties or obſcurities that are found in it.

The authority of revelation depends upon this, that it is the will and word of God; and he that knows he has the word of God, knows that he has a revelation of certain authority. The firſt queſtion then is, Whether this knowledge may be attained, before we have a diſtinct and explicit underſtanding

of all the parts of the revelation? If it may, then it is certain, that the obſcurity of ſome parts of the revelation cannot deſtroy the authority of the whole. We know very well, in all ordinary caſes, that theſe are two very diſtinct acts of knowledge, and not in the leaſt dependent upon one another, to know who ſpoke ſuch words, and to know the true ſenſe and import of thoſe words. One man may certainly know who ſpoke them, though he knows not the meaning of them: another may know the meaning of them, without knowing who ſpoke them. In revelation the caſe is the ſame: our Saviour ſpoke many things in parables, which the diſciples underſtood not, and which he afterwards explained to them. Now I would aſk any man, whether the diſciples did not as certainly know that thoſe parables were the word of Chriſt, before he explained them, as they did afterwards? If they did, thoſe parables were to them of the ſame authority, though not of the ſame uſe, when they were obſcure, as when they were explained. In human laws the caſe is the ſame: the authority of them depends not upon their being diſtinctly underſtood by all men; for the man, who has no ability to expound a ſtatute, may yet be certain of its authority, if he will have recourſe to the proper records. And there are many ſtatutes of this realm, the authority of which no man doubts of, though, at the ſame time, thoſe who are beſt able to judge are not agreed in the meaning and expoſition of them: and what would you think of a man, who ſhould affirm that we have no ſtatute-book in this kingdom, or none of any authority; and give you this reaſon for it, be-

none at all, is another queſtion: but I think it is evident, that no body of laws, human or divine, becomes void and of none effect, becauſe ſome parts are hard to be underſtood, or not to be underſtood. And if men diſpute upon ſuch places, and divide into a thouſand opinions about them, ſuch diviſions do ſtill leſs affect the law, which owes not its authority to the agreement or diſagreement of interpreters.

But it may be ſaid, and I think very juſtly, To what purpoſe is any thing delivered as law, or revelation, which is too obſcure to be underſtood? The very end of the law is, to be the rule of our actions; and how is this end to be attained, whilſt we continue ignorant of the meaning of the lawgiver? Men may blunder, and make dark laws, and ſo miſs the ſcope they aimed at; and the wonder is not great: but how ſhould any obſcurity darken the law of God? ſince we cannot but ſuppoſe, from the very end and nature of a law, that his intention was to be underſtood; and his wiſdom permits us not to doubt but that he was able to explain his meaning.

This brings us to conſider the fact, whether the Goſpel has ſuch difficulties and obſcurities in it, as may make us eſteem it unworthy of the wiſdom of God.

The Chriſtian revelation is contained in the books of the New Teſtament; but they are not all of the ſame kind, nor do they fall under the ſame conſideration in this queſtion. Had men given themſelves time to think coolly, and to make the true ſeparation in this caſe, we had not perhaps been told, that the difficulties of ſome parts of the Scripture are an objection to the revelation itſelf.

The books of the New Teſtament may be conſi-
red either as hiſtorical, as doctrinal, or as contro-
rſial, and ſome as a mixture of the two laſt. By
: hiſtorical, I underſtand the narrative of our Sa-
our's life and death, and of the preaching of his
oſtles after his reſurrection and aſcenſion. Theſe,
they are merely hiſtorical, afford none of thoſe
ficulties which are ſo much complained of: the
ry is plain and ſimple, and the different accounts
it, in the ſeveral Goſpels, vary no more from
:h other, than may naturally be expected from
ferent pens.

By the doctrinal, I underſtand thoſe matters of
:th, and rules of duty, which do not regard this or
at particular caſe, but were intended for the uſe of
e whole world, and are to continue to the end of

And if there be a clear law, and clearly expreſ-
l, in the world, this is the law. Can words more
:arly expreſs the honour and worſhip we are to
y to God, or can more familiar directions be
ven in this caſe, than are to be found in the Goſ-
l? Is not idolatry clearly condemned in the Goſ-
l? Is there any other thing relating to divine
orſhip, that we yet want inſtructing in? Are not the
ities likewiſe, which we owe to each other, made
ident and plain, and can there be any diſpute
out them, except what ariſes from luſt, or ava-
:e, or other ſelf-intereſt? As to the peculiar bene-
:s of the Goſpel, are they not declared without
ſcurity? Can you read the Goſpel, and doubt
hether Chriſt died for you; whether God will
ant pardon to the penitent, or his aſſiſtance to
oſe who aſk it; whether he will reward all ſuch

in glory, who continue the faithful diſciples of his Son? What other revelation do we want, or can we deſire, in theſe great and weighty concerns? Or, what is there wanting to make up a complete ſyſtem of religion? Theſe things you read in the Goſpels, theſe things you read in the other writings of the Apoſtles; in theſe there is a perfect harmony and conſent of all the inſpired writers.

But ſtill, you ſay, there are difficulties in Scripture. And ſo there are: but they are ſuch as do not interfere with the clear revelation made by Chriſt. The controverſial parts of Scripture, ſuch I mean as combat the particular opinions and errors of the Jews or others, are in many places dark, and hard to be underſtood: but had there never been any diſpute with the Jews or others, had all obeyed without diſpute, the Goſpel had been perfect; and is perfect ſtill, however divines, or others, may differ in expounding the particulars incident to thoſe debates. Had St. Paul ſaid nothing of election or reprobation, (and, as theſe terms are generally underſtood, nothing perhaps he has ſaid,) our Goſpel had not been leſs complete; ſince theſe points, however underſtood, make no alteration in our duty, and they ought to make none in our faith. It was a proper part of the Apoſtles' office to root out the prejudices and errors which ſtood in the way of the Goſpel of Chriſt; and whilſt they were diſputing with Jew and Gentile, and proving that Jeſus is the Chriſt, they were doing the work of their great maſter. Theſe writings, conveyed down to us, are of ineſtimable value, and worth our utmoſt pains and ſtudy to underſtand, being tranſcripts of

ıt wiſdom with which the Apoſtles were endowed. ıey contain the great doctrines, and the great ›ofs, of Chriſtianity; in which points they are not ly of the greateſt authority, but have likewiſe the :ateſt clearneſs: the particular diſputes which are ermixed refer often to principles and opinions, ıich we can hardly, at leaſt not ſurely, diſcover; d when men apply things pointed to one ſingle :w by the Apoſtles, which view they have no :ar ſight of, to the general doctrines of Chriſtian-, no wonder if they diſturb the whole, and ſpread nfuſion over the cleareſt parts of the Goſpel.

To this conduct have been owing many of the ſputes which have perplexed the world; and men ve forgot the plain parts of Scripture, while, to e utter ruin of Chriſtian charity, they have ırried one another about the obſcure ones. To re one inſtance of this: If there be any thing ıin in any book in the world, this is plain in ripture, *That without holineſs no man ſhall ſee God.* ıis is the foundation of all religion, the ground on which the revelation itſelf is built; and yet ıo is there that wants to be informed, that doc-nes deſtructive of this great article have been ad-nced upon the authority of Scripture? Who has t heard that good works are not neceſſary to juſ-ication? and heard St. Paul quoted for a vouch-! not where he is delivering the general doctrines Chriſtianity, but where he is beating down the rticular miſtakes of his countrymen. As to theſe rts of Scripture, happy is he who underſtands them, r he ſhall diſcover much of the wiſdom and juſtice God in his dealings with his ancient people, the

people of the Jews: but he that underſtands them not, has this comfort, that his ſalvation, his religion, depends not upon any controverſy that concerned the Jews only, but upon the plain declarations of God made to all mankind.

Thus much may ſerve to ſhew, how far the difficulties and obſcurities, which really are found in the holy Scripture, do affect the common cauſe of religion: and I think it is evident, that our common religion ſtands clear even of theſe difficulties.

Other difficulties there are, which more properly belong to religious men, than religion: ſuch are the diſputes and nice inquiries of the ſchools, which often enter into the debates of learned writers. But it is ſtrange to find theſe urged as objections againſt the Goſpel, by any ſober-minded man. For what are theſe diſputes to the Goſpel? God has promiſed his aſſiſtance to all who endeavour to ſerve him: is there any difficulty in underſtanding this? Let the ſchools conſider the nature of grace, and how it influences the mind, and divide it into an hundred ſorts, what is that to the Goſpel? or what is it to a man who is aſſured that God will aſſiſt him, and who knows that God cannot want means to make good his promiſe?

In like manner there are many doubts about the ſacraments of the Goſpel, and how and what grace they confer: but, diſpute as you will, this one point is clear, *He that believes and is baptized ſhall be ſaved.*

Suppoſe this, you will ſay, to be true, and that theſe doubts and difficulties do not affect the authority or truth of the Goſpel; yet they are ſo

lended with the cauſe of religion, that they are ot eaſily ſeparated from it by unlearned and un-tilful men: and this at leaſt renders the Goſpel of ttle uſe, ſince it is a rule, the ſtraightneſs of which annot be diſcerned by the generality of mankind. nd this brings me to my ſecond head,

To conſider theſe difficulties with reſpect to our-ılves.

From what has been already ſaid it is evident, ıat the Scriptures contain a plain and intelligible ſtem of religion: and would men follow the di-ctions of what they do and may underſtand, and ot think themſelves under direction of what they o not underſtand, there would be no great diffi-ılty in this caſe. But the misfortune is, that men ften fancy they underſtand what they do not, and ıiſe rules and principles of religion to themſelves ıt of places of which they are perfectly ignorant: ıd how can this be avoided? In the firſt place, is at every man's peril, if he makes any rule to imſelf, contrary to the plain expreſs commands of od, which he does or may eaſily underſtand. In ıman laws, the main of the ſubject's duty is plain; ıd if he miſtakes any dark paſſages, yet ſo as to ep ſtrictly to his known duty, the conſequence rhaps may be tolerable, and he excuſable: but if man from any dark ſtatute ſhould infer a right to b and murder his neighbour, and act accordingly, hich acts of violence are plainly forbid in the w,) he ought to ſuffer, not for miſunderſtanding ıe obſcure law, but for tranſgreſſing the plain ıe. The ſame reaſon holds as to the divine law:

if a man takes care to obſerve what he does underſtand, his miſtakes may not be dangerous: but if he forms to himſelf a liberty from the obſcure places, inconſiſtent with the plain intelligible laws of the Goſpel, and acts accordingly; thoſe plain laws, which ſhould have been his rule, will be his condemnation.

But plain places are not equally plain to all capacities; and therefore even in this there may be a latitude; a latitude which we cannot determine, but which God, who is to be the judge, both can and will: and the great difficulty which men make to themſelves in this caſe, ſeems to me to ariſe from a miſapprehenſion of the judgment of God. Among men all are judged by the ſame rule, one law comprehends all, and is of the ſame interpretation and extent in all caſes. That it is ſo, is the effect of human weakneſs; for in truth and equity, if we could come at them, no two caſes are perhaps exactly alike, or equally ſubject to the ſame rule: but men cannot allow for the different capacities and circumſtances of men, which they cannot judge of; and therefore all who are eſteemed to have reaſon enough to govern themſelves, are concluded under one law; and only children, ideots, and madmen are excepted caſes. Though in truth the degrees by which men approach to madneſs, or folly, could they be limited, which they cannot, would deſerve a diſtinct conſideration.

Now, if you conceive the judgment of God to be like the judgment of man, and that all ſhall be tried by one and the ſame rule; no wonder you

aſk, how ignorant men ſhall come to the knowledge of their duty under the preſent doubts and difficulties which cloud religion.

But the truth is this; God, who gave all men one law, gave every man that ſhare of reaſon which he enjoys: fools are capable of receiving no law; and no man is farther capable than in proportion to the degree of reaſon which God has given him: and conſequently, in truth and equity, the law is no farther a law to him, than his reaſon is capable of receiving it. And ſince reaſon comes as much from God, as the law itſelf; it is wrong to imagine that the true ſenſe of the law is the only and the ſingle rule by which God will judge: ſince it is evident in equity and juſtice, that the ſentence on every man muſt ariſe from the complex conſideration of the law that was before him, and the degree of reaſon which he had to apply it.

This great difficulty therefore, I beſeech you, truſt with God; and doubt not but that the righteous Judge of the world will do righteouſly.

DISCOURSE XVI.

EPHESIANS ii. 18.

For through him we both have an acceſs by one Spirit unto the Father.

THESE words, rightly underſtood, will give us a diſtinct conception of the nature of the Chriſtian religion, as it ſtands diſtinguiſhed from all others, whether natural, or pretending to revelation. All religions pretend to give acceſs to God, by inſtructing men in what manner to approach him by prayer and ſupplication: how to pleaſe him, and obtain his favour and protection, by ſuch works as each religion accounts to be holy and acceptable to God: and how to reconcile ourſelves to him, after having offended him by our tranſgreſſions, through ſorrow and repentance, or ſuch other means as have been deviſed and inſtituted as effectual to this end. But the acceſs to God, which the Goſpel opens to us, is to be had only under the guidance and direction of God's holy Spirit, and in the name, and through the mediation, of God's own Son. This acceſs is the only one which the Chriſtian religion knows any thing of; for we cannot come to God, but by

his holy Spirit, and through his Son: and this is what no other religion does or can pretend to.

The end of all religion is manifeſtly this, to pleaſe God by ſerving him according to his will, in order to obtain of him happineſs in this world and in the next: for the belief that God is the governor of the world, and the giver of every good thing, is the foundation of all the religious worſhip and honour which are paid to him. All religions being thus far the ſame, they differ when they come to preſcribe the method, and to appoint the proper means by which God is to be ſerved and applied to.

Two things there are, which muſt neceſſarily be regarded in the choice and appointment of theſe means; the holineſs and majeſty of God, and the nature and condition of man: for unleſs the means preſcribed are ſuch as are ſuitable to the holineſs and majeſty of God, he can never be pleaſed by them; for whatever is contrary to his holineſs, or injurious to his majeſty, muſt ever be an abomination to him. On the other hand, the means of religion muſt likewiſe be adapted to the uſe of man, muſt be ſuch as he can practiſe, and ſuch as, his preſent condition conſidered, will enable him to ſerve God acceptably; for without this, how proper ſoever the means may be in themſelves, yet they can be of no uſe or ſervice to him.

If we examine all the ſchemes of religion which either prevail in thoſe parts of the world where the Goſpel is unknown, or which are ſet up in oppoſition to the Goſpel where it is known, we ſhall find that they ſplit upon one or other of theſe rocks. The Gentile religion is inconſiſtent with the holi-

neſs of God, as mixing impure rites and ceremonies with its worſhip, and allowing the practice of ſuch vices as even nature abhors: it is injurious likewiſe to his majeſty, as dividing the honour, which is due to him alone, among the creatures; teaching men to pay religious worſhip to thoſe who by nature are not gods. On the other ſide, natural religion, which ſeems to be the moſt growing ſcheme, and is ſet up in oppoſition to the Goſpel, taking its riſe from the purity and holineſs of God's nature, and the eſſential difference of good and evil, preſcribes a worſhip pure and holy; but it preſcribes it to men who have loſt their purity and holineſs, and are no longer able to perform the rigorous conditions: it requires brick without allowing ſtraw; exacting of men, in their preſent degenerate ſtate, the purity and holineſs of uncorrupted reaſon and nature: it affords no ſtrength or aſſiſtance to men, to ſecure againſt ſin; and when they have ſinned, it cannot give them any certain aſſurance of pardon and forgiveneſs: ſo that men, not being able to perform its conditions, and having no ſecurity of the mercy of God without performing them, can have no ſettled peace or ſatisfaction in it.

From theſe two conſiderations plainly appears the deplorable condition of mankind without the interpoſition of God by a new revelation of himſelf to the world: for, after the utmoſt efforts that you can make to frame a religion in all reſpects proper, you will ſtill find that it will be defective in one or other of theſe reſpects. If you require ſuch degrees of holineſs from men, as may render their ſervice acceptable to the holy God, you will require what

they cannot perform; and thereby preclude them of any acceſs to him: or, if you conſult the preſent powers of men, and require no more righteouſneſs, than they by their ſtrength can arrive at; if you indulge the paſſions which you cannot correct, if you allow the vices you cannot reform, if you tolerate the infirmities which you cannot remove: by thus adapting religion to the condition of men, you will render it too impure to be accepted by God, who *is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*; and the communication between heaven and earth will ſtill be ſhut up againſt all ſuch who *hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs*.

The Chriſtian religion alone has effectually provided againſt both theſe caſes: it requires a worſhip ſpiritual, pure, and holy; its laws are juſt and righteous, but abate nothing of the ſtricteſt rules of reaſon and morality; it exacts from us not only an outward obedience and conformity in our actions, but it ſearcheth the very heart and reins, and requireth *truth in the inward parts*; it reſtrains every diſſolute thought of our minds, and every inordinate deſire of our hearts. On the other ſide, that the gracious purpoſes of God may not be defeated by the weakneſs and infirmity of men, it has provided proper remedies for every want: it has brought down from heaven the pardon of God to all the ſins of men, which was ſealed with the blood of its great author, the ever-bleſſed Son of God: it has reconciled us to our offended Father, and conferred on us anew the ſpirit of adoption: it has put us under the direction of the Holy Spirit, who is our fellow-labourer in the work of God, and who ſo ef-

ctually helpeth our infirmities, that *when we are eak, then are we ſtrong*; who is our ſtay in proſpe-y, and our ſupport in adverſity, and the undi-led companion of our ſpiritual warfare, leading us ough Chriſt to God, who is the end of all our pes. And, as it has thus ſtrengthened and ena-d us to draw near to God, ſo has it likewiſe as ef-tually ſecured our acceſs to him, through Chriſt, o *ſitteth at the right hand of God, to make continual erceſſion for us*; to offer up, and by himſelf to fect, all our prayers and praiſes, before the one of God; to ſupply all our wants, to confirm r faith, to ſtrengthen our virtue, and to make our ntance available to the remiſſion of our ſins; d, at the laſt, if we perform the conditions on our rt, to receive us into the kingdom of his Father ever.

The uſe I would make of the text, and of what s been already diſcourſed on it, is to obſerve to u,

Firſt, that theſe means of ſalvation, which the riſtian religion has provided, were neceſſary to e life of the world, the ſtate and condition of man nſidered.

Secondly, that theſe means being neceſſary, it s likewiſe neceſſary to reveal to mankind the ctrine concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit; d that the belief of theſe doctrines is neceſſary to ery Chriſtian, as far as the right uſe of the means pends upon the right faith and belief of the doc-nes: for, as the Apoſtle to the Hebrews tells us, t whoever *comes to God, muſt believe that he is*; ſo ewiſe, whoever comes to God through Chriſt, in

the Spirit, muſt believe that the Spirit is the Spirit of God and of Chriſt, and able to direct him; that Chriſt is the Son of God, and able to bring him to his Father. And by this means ſhall we be able to juſtify to ourſelves the wiſdom and goodneſs of God in revealing this wonderful knowledge to men, inaſmuch as he did it, not to impoſe arbitrarily upon their faith and their underſtanding, but in order to perfect and render effectual their ſalvation.

Firſt, I would obſerve to you, that theſe means of ſalvation which the Chriſtian religion has provided, namely, the aſſiſtance of the Spirit, and the mediation of the Son, were neceſſary to the life of the world, the ſtate and condition of man conſidered.

I would not here be underſtood to affirm, that theſe means were ſo abſolutely neceſſary in themſelves, that God could not by any other method ſave the world. The wiſdom and the ways of God are infinite and unſearchable: we cannot, and therefore ought not to pretend to ſet bounds to them. To inquire, in what other way God might poſſibly have ſaved mankind, will neither make us wiſer in this world, nor happier in the next.

What I would then be underſtood to mean, is this; that the condition of man before the coming of Chriſt was ſuch, that he could not, by the help of reaſon and nature, ſo apply himſelf to God, as to be ſecure of his pardon and mercy; but there was a neceſſity of providing other means beſides thoſe of reaſon and nature, which no one could provide but God alone: that he has provided us with the aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit, and appointed his own Son for our Redeemer and Mediator. Some means

eing therefore abſolutely neceſſary to be provided, nd theſe being the means made choice of by God; re may ſafely affirm, without prying too far into he hidden myſteries of God, that theſe means were eceſſary to the ſalvation of the world.

The truth of this propoſition thus limited, is that hich does moſt plainly ſhew us the reaſonableneſs of he Goſpel, and the wiſdom and goodneſs of God in he revelation of it: for, ſuppoſe the contrary to this o be true, that men were able of themſelves to do he whole will of God, and ſo to apply to him as to ngage his favour and mercy, and to obtain ſalvaion for themſelves at his hands; and you will find it ery hard to account for the reaſonableneſs of the hriſtian religion, which provides preternatural aſiſtances to enable us to do that which nature can o without them; or for the wiſdom of God, in naking the revelation to ſerve thoſe ends which nen knew how to accompliſh without it. But, if ou conſider man in the ſtate under which the Scripure repreſents him before the coming of Chriſt, oft to God and to himſelf, the ſlave of paſſion, and he ſervant of ſin, equally unable to govern himſelf, nd to ſerve his Maker; you will then ſee the want here was of a Mediator to be the ambaſſador of our eace, and to reconcile us to God; you will then ee the want there was of the Holy Spirit's influence o enable us to ſubdue thoſe unruly paſſions and ppetites, which were a partition-wall between us nd our God; that we might ſerve our Maker in pirit and in truth, and *perfect holineſs in the fear of God.*

Give me leave to ſtay here a little to repreſent to

you the economy of God in the Goſpel diſpenſation, which the Apoſtle, in the text, has ſhut up in few words; *We have acceſs to God, through Chriſt, by the Spirit.* To give you a diſtinct conception of this, and of the different offices of the Son and of the Spirit, you muſt conceive the Spirit of God as always preſent with us; the Son, as always in the preſence of the Father. The Spirit dwells with the faithful, to guide and to direct them, to ſecond and encourage all their good deſires, to help them in overcoming their infirmities; in a word, to labour together with them in the work of their ſalvation, to make their calling and election ſure. The Son of God is at the right hand of the Majeſty on high; there he is our advocate, he intercedes for us, he receives and offers up our prayers, he obtains for us the remiſſion of our ſins in virtue of the one oblation which he once made of himſelf upon the croſs, the memorial of which is ever in the ſight of God. This will teach us what it is to *have acceſs by the Spirit, through Chriſt.* For the Spirit abideth with us, he is at our right hand, and by his happy influence it is, that we draw near to Chriſt, and by him approach to the Father. The Son is our high-prieſt, clothed with majeſty and power, and ſeated at the right hand of God, able to ſave all who will come to him; through whoſe powerful and always prevailing mediation and interceſſion the way is opened to pardon and reconciliation. The Spirit is our comforter, given us to dwell and to abide with us, to be a principle of new life within us, to quicken our mortal bodies, that, dying to ſin, we may live unto God through holineſs. To draw men to God

: work of the Spirit, who therefore reſides and
ls with men: to reconcile God to man is the
of our High-prieſt, who lives in the glory of
, making continual interceſſion for us.
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tind under what view you pleaſe, you will al-
find a proper remedy provided by the mercy
od. If you reflect upon the holineſs of God,
his hatred of ſin and iniquity, and begin to fear
he can never be reconciled to ſinners; take
age, the work is difficult, but the Son of God
undertaken it; and how great ſoever the diſ-
: between God and you is, yet through the
you may have acceſs unto him. If ſtill you
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means depends upon the right faith and belief
ıe doctrines.
'e that hath the Son, ſays St. John, *hath life; and*
ıat hath not the Son of God, hath not life: and
n, *whoſoever denieth the Son, hath not the Father.*
ſince we can only come to the Father through
Son, to deny the Son, is to cut off all commu-
tion between us and the Father. The ſame may
aid of the bleſſed Spirit, through whom we are

in Chriſt: *If any man*, ſays St. Paul, *have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his:* our bleſſed Lord has himſelf told us, *That this is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom he has ſent.*

When we were to be put under the conduct of the Spirit, and all our hopes depended upon our obedience to, and compliance with, his holy motions; was it not neceſſary to inform us who this Spirit is? to let us know, that he is ſufficient to the office allotted him; that, knowing perfectly the mind of God, even as the ſpirit of a man knoweth the things of a man, he is able fully to inſtruct us and to direct us in the ways of God; that, being infinite, and unconfined in time or place, he is equal to the extenſive charge committed to his care, and can be ready at all times, and in all places, to ſuccour the faithful ſervants of God; that, being the Spirit of power and of might, he is able to reſcue us out of all dangers, and protect us againſt all the powers and principalities of the kingdom of darkneſs? It may be hard perhaps to human reaſon to conceive, that this holy Spirit is the eternal Spirit of God, and ſo intimately united with God, as to know the mind of God as perfectly, as the ſpirit of a man which is in him knoweth the mind of man; but it would be harder ſtill to believe, that the Spirit could do what is aſcribed to him in Scripture, without believing him to be this great and glorious perſon. It is a more rational act of faith, to expect from the eternal Spirit of God the ſanctification of our ſouls and bodies, ſpiritual aid and aſſiſtance in all our trials and temptations, and whatever elſe is neceſſary to our ſalvation; than it would be to expect the ſame

things from any other ſpirit, of whoſe power and attributes we knew nothing. The power and mightineſs of the Spirit, made known to us by God, is a reaſonable, a juſt foundation for the hope and confidence we have in him; but, were we ignorant of his power, our truſt in him would be without ground; and we ſhould loſe this boaſting, which is now the glory of our faith, that *we know in whom we have believed.* Since therefore, by the determinate counſel of God, the redemption of the world was to be the work of his Son; and the ſanctification of it, the work of his Spirit; he has dealt with us more like reaſonable creatures, in declaring to us the dignity and power of the perſons in whom we are to truſt; than he would have done, had he required of us the ſame faith and reliance on thoſe perſons, without declaring to us how able and powerful they are to help us. If therefore it be reaſonable for God to ſave the world, by redeeming it by his Son, by ſanctifying it by his Holy Spirit, it cannot be unreaſonable for him to make known his Son and his Spirit to the world, that all men everywhere may by the one Spirit of God, and through the only Son of God, approach to the Father. And this ſhews how fooliſhly men charge God, when they complain of the heavy impoſition laid upon their faith and their underſtanding by the Goſpel doctrines concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit. God has revealed this for our ſakes only, not for matter of ſpeculation, or for the enlarging of our knowledge; but that, having a reaſonable ground of aſſurance and hope in him, we may, through faith, and patient abiding, inherit the promiſes.

You ſee now what every Chriſtian has to expect and hope for from the aſſiſtance of the Spirit, and interceſſion of the Son of God. We all were ſtrangers to God, and children of diſobedience; we are now reconciled to God, and can approach him as our loving Father. Having thus acceſs to the Father, our all depends on the uſe we make of this great privilege. By having acceſs to God, we are not placed in a ſtate of ſecurity, but in a ſtate of probation: we are received as prodigal ſons come home; if we continue obedient, we may hope for the inheritance; but, if we turn prodigals again, our caſe will be deſperate. This is the condition of Chriſtians. The Scripture has told us what our preſent ſtate is; but, as to our future ſtate, that depends upon our obeying, or not obeying, the commands of God. And thoſe who look for farther ſecurity, and expect to be aſcertained what their future ſtate will be, do very much impoſe upon themſelves, and aſcribe to the Holy Spirit an office, of which the Scripture knows nothing. God has done, and will do, great things for you; let not this make you vain and preſumptuous, but let it excite your care, that the gift of God may not be beſtowed on you in vain; and always bear in mind the Apoſtle's advice, *Work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.* Some imagine, that God's working with us is a reaſon why we ſhould be confident and ſecure of our ſalvation: but you ſee St. Paul was of another mind. He writes to thoſe who certainly had the Spirit; for he tells them, that God did work in them both to will and to do: but does he.

them that they were ſafe and ſecure, and out
l danger? No, he ſays nothing like it; on the
rary, he calls upon them to fear and tremble,
having received ſo great a gift, they ſhould by
negligence, as thinking themſelves ſecure, for-
ll the hopes of the Goſpel.

od ſays, with reſpect to the old world, *My Spirit not always ſtrive with man:* the caſe is the ſame
:r the Goſpel. The Spirit of God works with
ut will not always ſtrive with us; and therefore,
ſt we may have the help of God's Spirit, we
t lay hold of the opportunity, and work with
. And whoever conſiders this, will find he has
t reaſon to tremble and fear; for, if he loſes the
ortunity of making the beſt uſe of the aſſiſtance
ie Spirit when it is offered, he may loſe the Spi-
ind himſelf, for ever. Let us therefore work
ſt we have the light, and continually pray in
words of our church, *O Lord, take not thy Holy it from us.*

DISCOURSE XVII.

EPHESIANS ii. 8.

For by grace are ye ſaved through faith; and that not of yourſelves; it is the gift of God.

WE have here, in few words, the argument which St. Paul always inſiſts on, when he has occaſion to ſet forth the kindneſs of God towards mankind. Life and immortality are the greateſt bleſſings that we have any notion of; and theſe were brought to light by the Goſpel of Chriſt: him God gave for a redeemer to the world, *that whoſoever believeth on him ſhould not die, but have eternal life.* And even that through faith in him we are ſaved, is the gift of God; for of ourſelves we are able to do nothing. Theſe things are taught us in the compaſs of the text, *We are ſaved by grace:* we had no title or claim to ſalvation, but God of his own good will hath ſent among us plenteous redemption; and, according to the richneſs of his mercy, and the great love wherewith he loved us, hath, together with Chriſt, quickened us who were dead in ſins. The condition of this ſalvation on our part is faith; for we are ſaved by grace *through faith.* We muſt be-

lieve our Redeemer, that he cometh from God, and hath the words of life; and muſt rely on him to perform the word of ſalvation which is gone out of his mouth. But neither upon the performance of this condition can we ſay that our own arm hath ſaved us, or that we have done any thing towards perfecting our redemption; for this ſalvation through faith, and this faith, is *not of ourſelves, it is the gift of God.*

I ſhall diſcourſe on this propoſition, that faith is the gift of God: Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew what the Scripture doctrine on this head is; and, Secondly, ſhall ſuggeſt to you ſome conſiderations proper to this ſubject.

Firſt then, let us conſider what the Scripture doctrine on this head is. The faith which St. Paul ſpeaks of in the text is ſuch a faith as is effectual to ſalvation; for it is the faith through which, by grace, we are ſaved: this faith he aſſerts to be the gift of God. There are different ſignifications of the word *faith* in Scripture: ſometimes it ſignifies barely an aſſent of the mind to the revelations and doctrines of the Goſpel, grounded upon ſuch evidence as the things were capable of. This faith ſometimes is merely the effect of common ſenſe; for men cannot help believing the things they ſee. Sometimes this faith is grounded on the neceſſary deductions of reaſon from common principles; by this means we arrive at the knowledge of God: a man of reaſon can no more avoid believing the exiſtence of a firſt cauſe, than a man with eyes can avoid thinking that there is a material world, in which he lives. But neither has this aſſent of the

ind the true nature of faith in it: *Thou believeſt*, ith St. James, *that there is one God; thou doeſt ell; the devils alſo believe, and tremble.* But nei-er of theſe kinds of faith being the faith through hich we are ſaved, you cannot ſay, that St. Paul ſerts of theſe, that they are the gift of God; any rther than as ſenſe and reaſon are his gifts, by hich we know theſe and all other things. Nor do e teach that nature and reaſon cannot lead to the eculative knowledge of divine truths; for the evi-ence of all divine truth reſolves itſelf ultimately to either ſenſe or reaſon; which are the common ifts of God to mankind, by the principles of which ie truth of all things, depending upon the deduc-ons of ſenſe and reaſon, may be proved and exa-ined. From the exerciſe of reaſon we come to now God, and the eſſential difference between ood and evil; and by theſe principles are enabled) judge of any doctrine, whether it be agreeable to ie pure and holy nature of God; which is the firſt reſumptive argument for the truth of any divine evelation; that it is holy and pure, and ſuch an ne, as, were God to have given a law to the world, e would have given: from reaſon we learn the nlimited power of God; and from ſenſe and rea-)n we know the limited power of man; and are nabled to diſtinguiſh between the works which ie power or policy of man can perform, and the orks which can flow only from the unbounded ower of God: from hence we can judge of the oſitive arguments of a divine revelation, the works nd miracles which are offered to the world in con-rmation of its truth. Thus far the natural gifts of

ſenſe and reaſon can carry us; but the reſult is barely the aſſent or diſſent of the mind to the things under inquiry; which aſſent alone is not the faith through which we are ſaved.

But let it be obſerved, as to theſe firſt rudiments of faith, that though reaſon and knowledge may attain to them, yet the exerciſe of reaſon and knowledge depends upon the will and inclination; which are not naturally much given to dwell upon the ſubject of religion, but are engaged in the affairs and concerns of the world, and taken up in the purſuit of preſent pleaſures and enjoyments: that, were men left to themſelves, but few would arrive even to this degree of faith; not for want of underſtanding to diſcern, but for want of will to inquire after, the things which make for their ſalvation. Thus, at the firſt preaching of the Goſpel, all the worldly-minded men, and generally all the great men, were profeſſed enemies to our Saviour. No ſooner did he appear to preach a new doctrine, but they oppoſed him: not that they had time or opportunity to examine his pretenſions; but this preſumption, that his doctrine would thwart their intereſt, and leſſen their power and authority among the people, prevailed with them to endeavour to ſtifle and ſuppreſs this new doctrine before it ſpread to their prejudice: in which they were evidently guided, not by ſenſe or reaſon, but by a perverſe will and evil diſpoſition. And ſince men cannot but know, from their natural notions of good and evil, that any revelation coming from a pure and holy God muſt croſs their evil deſigns and affections, they cannot but lie under a great indiſpoſition

to inquire after divine truths, in which, as long as luſt and paſſion have the dominion over them, they can promiſe themſelves but little comfort or ſatiſfaction: ſo that, to enable men fairly to examine the truth of a divine revelation, and to acknowledge it upon full and ſufficient evidence, there muſt be ſuch a diſpoſition of mind to receive whatever may appear to be the will of God, as may enable you to be impartial judges. This our Saviour requires of us, when he ſays, *If any man will do the will of God, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf*; that is, if any man has ſo far got the victory over his own paſſions and luſts, as to be ready to give himſelf to the direction of God's will, whenever it may be made appear to him; this man is in a right diſpoſition to receive the truths of the Goſpel, and to judge whether Chriſt be indeed the Prophet of the Moſt High. Now this diſpoſition is far from being natural to man, according to the nature man has at preſent; and therefore thus to prepare and diſpoſe men's minds to receive the Goſpel, is the work of the Spirit, and is aſcribed to him conſtantly in Scripture, where there is occaſion to ſpeak of it: *No man*, ſays our Lord, *can come unto me, except the Father, which hath ſent me, draw him.* And again, *No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father*; that is, unleſs the Father, by the grace of his Spirit, inclines and diſpoſes his will to attend to the words of life which I deliver. To the ſame purpoſe he ſpeaks in another place, *He that is of God, heareth God's word*; where, to be of God, is no more than to be of the number of

thoſe who are diſpoſed to obey God; for, if to be of God ſignifies any thing more, it will hardly leave any tolerable ſenſe for the word. Our Saviour would not ſay, Thoſe who obey God will hear God's word; which is ſaying, Thoſe who obey God, will obey God: and therefore, to be of God, muſt ſignify no more than to be ready and diſpoſed to receive the will of God, by the influence of his grace. To be of God, and to be drawn of God, and to be willing to do the will of God, are manifeſtly put to ſignify the ſame thing, becauſe the ſame thing is affirmed of them. Our Saviour ſays, *No man can come unto him, unleſs he be drawn of God*; and yet he ſays, *He that is of God will hear his word*; and, in another place, *If any man is willing to do the will of God, he ſhall know of his doctrine*; and if ſo, then to be willing to do the will of God muſt amount to the ſame thing with being of God, and being drawn by God. From whence it follows, that thoſe who are willing to do his will, that is, diſpoſed to receive his truth, are drawn by him; that is, all who are well diſpoſed to receive the faith of Chriſt, owe their diſpoſition to the grace and influence of God's holy Spirit. Accordingly we read of Lydia, that *God opened her heart to attend unto the things which were ſpoken of Paul*; where, opening her heart, can ſignify nothing but inclining her will to attend to, and examine, the truths of the Goſpel, which were the things ſpoken by Paul. And, as faith is aſcribed to this diſpoſition wrought by the Spirit of God, ſo the want of faith is aſcribed to the contrary diſpoſition, where a man is under the power of luſt and appetite, and poſſeſſed with the

love of this world and the pleaſures of it: *If our Goſpel be hid*, ſays St. Paul, *it is hid to them that are loſt: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, leſt the light of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt, who is the image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them.*

But, ſecondly, faith ſignifies likewiſe truſt and reliance on God; and includes a confident hope and expectation, that God will perform his promiſes made to us in his Son. It is deſcribed as an active principle of religion, influencing the mind to obedience to the law of God. This is the faith through which *we are ſaved*, and is affirmed by St. Paul to be *the gift of God:* to this faith we owe our growth and progreſs in all kinds of Chriſtian graces and virtues; this is the foundation of them, and this it is that makes them acceptable to God, that they are done in faith. That faith is perfect which is attended with a good conſcience, *void of offence towards God and towards man.* Theſe two St. Paul couples together in his advice to Timothy, enjoining him *to hold the faith and a good conſcience, which ſome having put away, concerning faith have made ſhipwreck:* ſo that faith cannot ſtand without a good conſcience; that is, it is no faith which does not *purge the conſcience from dead works*, and *perfect holineſs in the fear of God.* Now all that reaſon can do, is to aſſent or diſſent to any doctrine; but obedience muſt come from the will. Wicked men often believe; but, like the devils, they tremble at the majeſty of God, and do not love or delight in him, or ſeek to do his will. Faith then is made up of the concurrence of the will and the under-

ſtanding. The underſtanding is ſtill the rule to judge truth by; but the will is not the right rule of action, and therefore the aſſiſtance of the Spirit, to induce the will to follow the underſtanding, is neceſſary in the perfect work of faith: and this work is aſcribed to the Spirit in Scripture. Our Saviour, ſpeaking to his diſciples, tells them, *I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the ſame bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.* Chriſt abideth in his members by his Holy Spirit; and therefore we are told, *that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghoſt.* So then our Saviour's doctrine is, that without the aſſiſtance of his Spirit we can do nothing, but with it we may bring forth fruit. To bring forth fruit, in the phraſe of Scripture, is to be obedient to the laws of God, and to be employed in the works of righteouſneſs: ſo that faith cannot be perfected, or become the governing principle of our lives, without the aſſiſtance of the Spirit, to ſubdue our wills to the law of holineſs. Faith in this ſenſe is reckoned among the fruits of the Spirit, both in the Epiſtle to the Galatians, and in that to the Corinthians: *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, faith.* So, in the Epiſtle to the Philippians, the Apoſtle tells them, *It is given unto them in the behalf of Chriſt, not only to believe on him, but alſo to ſuffer for his ſake:* where the Apoſtle's doctrine is manifeſtly this; that both to believe in Chriſt, and to ſuffer for Chriſt, are the gifts of God through his Holy Spirit. I ſhall not multiply quotations upon this head, which lie ready to any diligent inquirer's ſearch; but ſhall ſpend the time

that remains in ſuggeſting to you ſome proper obſervations on this ſubject.

And, firſt, our aſcribing faith to the operation of the Spirit does not make our faith ceaſe to be a reaſonable act of the mind: and yet this ſurmiſe is apt to affect men; and they think it is for want of reaſon to prove our religion, that we require the gift of faith to make it go down. But the caſe is far otherwiſe: the Apoſtle adviſes us, *always to be ready to give to every one that aſketh it of us, a reaſon of the faith that is in us*; conſequently, reaſon and faith, or reaſon and the gift of the Spirit, are conſiſtent; or elſe it would not be poſſible for thoſe who receive faith by the Spirit, to give a reaſon of the faith that is in them. Beſides, a revelation ſufficiently atteſted, that is, ſufficiently proved to reaſon, is preſuppoſed to the work of faith; for the gift of faith adminiſters no new arguments for religion: and therefore, if it be not a reaſonable religion before we have faith, it cannot be ſo afterwards. The firſt work of faith upon the minds of men, as I proved by compariſon of ſeveral parts of Scripture, is to diſpoſe them to liſten after and obey the will of God. Lydia's heart was opened by grace; this did not make her, right or wrong, take up with the Apoſtle's doctrine, but it is ſaid, that *ſhe attended to the words that were ſpoken by Paul.* Now, the more you attend to a thing that has no reaſon in it, the leſs you will like it: let the Spirit therefore ſupply the grace of attention in the greateſt meaſure; if there wants reaſon or evidence in the things we attend to, attention will ſerve no other purpoſe than to ſhew us theſe defects: ſo that this

gift of the Spirit neither influences the reaſon of man, nor the reaſon of the thing; conſequently, this gift of the Spirit is no ways inconſiſtent with reaſon. So neither is that other gift of the Spirit, by which we are diſpoſed to a readineſs to obey the will of God; for my being ready to obey the will of God cannot make a doctrine to be the will of God, which is not the will of God; or make me ſee arguments to prove a doctrine where there are none: conſequently, let a man be ever ſo ready to obey the will of God, it cannot affect his judgment in diſcerning what is the will of God, or diſturb the exerciſe of reaſon in ſearching for the doctrine which does contain the will of God. And therefore this gift of the Spirit likewiſe leaves a man free to examine the proofs of religion, and does not influence his mind one way or other in judging the truth: for a man who is willing to do the will of God muſt neceſſarily be very unwilling to do what is not his will; and therefore will be very loth to take up with any doctrine for the will of God, which is not ſufficiently proved to be ſo. This grace therefore only puts him upon ſearching and examining the pretences of religion, upon the exerciſe of reaſon, to diſcern where truth lies: and this, I ſuppoſe, will be allowed to be the moſt reaſonable thing a man can do. Thus, you ſee, the aſſent of the mind to the truth of religion is an act of reaſon, and muſt be ſo notwithſtanding the gifts and aſſiſtances of the Spirit. And as reaſon is not diſturbed by the gifts of the Spirit, which are previous to the aſſent of the mind; ſo, I hope, it will not be thought it can be influenced by thoſe that are con-

ſequent to it. Faith is not perfected but through obedience. The power to obey and to love God we aſcribe to the Spirit. Now you cannot obey God, till you know what is the will of God; therefore you muſt firſt judge of religion, before this gift can operate: and therefore this gift cannot affect your reaſon one way or other. After you have proved and conſented to the truth of the Goſpel, it is highly reaſonable you ſhould obey it. But though reaſon, upon due application, can diſcern the truth, yet it cannot govern the corrupt will: and therefore it is one thing to judge with reaſon, another thing to act with reaſon: and the grace of obedience is given us by the Spirit, that we may not only think, but act, like reaſonable creatures.

I do not remember that God ever promiſed to force or ſubdue our reaſon to the belief of the Goſpel by his Spirit: if he had taken this method, he might have ſaved the trouble of working ſigns and wonders and miracles, and all other arguments might have been ſpared, which are only appeals to reaſon, and would have been needleſs, had the Spirit been given to particular perſons for the conviction of their minds. The Apoſtle often prays, in behalf of his converts, *that God would enlighten their minds and underſtandings*; *that he would increaſe their knowledge*; *that he would give them a right judgment in all things*. But I think it will be agreed, that the more enlightened a man's mind is, the larger the compaſs of knowledge and underſtanding, and the better his judgment is, the more acute he will be in diſtinguiſhing truth from falſehood; conſequently, the better able to judge of religion,

and the leſs ready to receive it without ſufficient evidence, that is, without reaſon.

In the ſecond chapter of the firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians, St. Paul treats of the method by which we arrive to the knowledge of ſpiritual truths: *They are*, he ſays, *ſpiritually diſcerned, and the natural man cannot receive them, they are fooliſhneſs to him*; and, upon this authority, even the uſe of reaſon has been rejected in inquiries of religion, and men ſent to the Spirit for proof. But what the Apoſtle ſays here will be found conſiſtent with what has been already ſaid upon this head. In the third verſe he tells the Corinthians, that *his preaching was not with the enticing words of man's wiſdom, but in the demonſtration of the Spirit and of power*; that is, he did not preach from natural topics, but preached the things which the Spirit had revealed to him; and gave the works of the Spirit, that is, ſigns and miracles, for proof of his doctrine. But this was a reaſonable proof ſtill, and ſuch an one as reaſon could judge of. Verſe the fourteenth he ſays, *The natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God:* which is very true; for how ſhould natural reaſon furniſh arguments to prove the revelations of God, which have no connection with natural principles of reaſon? But then he adds, *Theſe things are ſpiritually diſcerned*; or, as he words it in the eighteenth verſe, *they are diſcerned by comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual*; that is, by comparing the proofs of the Spirit and the revelations of the Spirit together. This compariſon is the work of reaſon; for reaſon diſcerns the agreement between theſe ſpiritual things, and, by conſidering the works

and wonders of the Spirit, ſubmits to the revelation of the Spirit. So what the Apoſtle affirms here is only this, that the revelations of God are not to be examined or known by principles or proofs of natural reaſon, but muſt be manifeſted by the proofs of the Spirit; for we have no proofs from reaſon for the revelations of the Goſpel, but we have the works of the Spirit, by which they are atteſted. And here it is plain what the work of the Spirit is: it brings proofs to the reaſon of man, but does not bring the reaſon of man to the proofs: ſo that reaſon and faith, or reaſon and the gift of the Spirit, are conſiſtent.

Secondly, as to the meaſure in which the Spirit is given, the Scripture is not expreſs: this we are ſure of, that all to whom the Spirit is given do not obey the Spirit; for we read of ſome who *reſiſt the Spirit of God*, who *do deſpite to the Holy Spirit*: from whence it is evident, that all who are loſt, are not loſt for want of due aſſiſtance from God; ſince they had the offer of the Spirit, but refuſed and withſtood his holy motions. God has engaged in Chriſt to give us all things neceſſary to our ſalvation; and therefore, as far as the Spirit is neceſſary, ſo far we are ſure of his aſſiſtance. As men improve in virtue and holineſs, they contract a greater familiarity with the Holy Spirit; with ſuch he is ſaid *to dwell, to abide with them*: which anſwers to what our Saviour ſays, *To him that hath, it ſhall be given; and from him that hath not, even that which he hath ſhall be taken away.* The plain conſequence of which is, that we ſhould, according to the Apoſtle's advice, *work out our ſalvation with*

fear and trembling; for God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleaſure. If therefore we ceaſe to work whilſt we have time and opportunity, God will withdraw his grace from us; *even that which we have, ſhall be taken from us.* We cannot work without God: therefore ſhould we work with fear and trembling, leſt, if we neglect the appointed time, we ſhould be left deſtitute of help, without hope or remedy.

Laſtly, We may collect what are the ſigns and marks of grace in the regenerate; even this, that we keep the will of God. I before obſerved, that to be drawn of God, and to be willing to do his will, are one and the ſame thing: if ſo, then all who do the will of God, are drawn of God; and all who are effectually drawn of God, do his will. From whence it follows, that all who live virtuouſly and holily have the Spirit of God, and all who do wickedly are of their father the devil. From whence it follows, that it is a vain and ill grounded confidence that ſome men have in their ſpiritual attainments, whilſt they work the works of darkneſs: for he only that doth the works of the Spirit hath the Spirit of God; *and hereby do we know that we love him, if we keep his commandments.*

DISCOURSE XVIII.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

Work out your own ſalvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleaſure.

THERE have not, perhaps, been any more unhappy diſputes in the Chriſtian church than thoſe relating to the natural powers of man to work out his own ſalvation, and thoſe relating to the nature and meaſure of the grace and aſſiſtance promiſed in the Goſpel of Chriſt. On one ſide it is inſiſted, that virtue and vice owe their being to the freedom and choice of the agent, and loſe their name when they are the effect of force and conſtraint; and, conſequently, that to ſuppoſe men to be made righteous by any influence from any other being than themſelves, is contrary to reaſon. And hence it is that ſome of the advocates for mere human reaſon, as ſufficient to all the purpoſes of ſalvation, deſpiſe the promiſes, made in the Goſpel, of grace and ſpiritual aſſiſtance; and others of them ſo explain them, as to leave them no meaning at all. On the other ſide, ſome zealous aſſerters of the doc-

trine of grace, in order to magnify this free gift of God, allow nothing to reaſon or the natural powers of men; but think it the higheſt preſumption, and the greateſt affront offered to the grace of God, to ſuppoſe that men can do any thing for themſelves. It is, in their own way of expreſſion, to make the power of God attendant on the weakneſs of man, and to make the grace of God the ſervant and handmaid of human reaſon. And thus it is agreed on both ſides, by thoſe who carry their reſpective opinions to the greateſt length, that either the power of man to work righteouſneſs muſt exclude the grace of God, or the grace of God muſt exclude all the effects and endeavours of human reaſon.

But as inconſiſtent as they may think theſe things to be, St. Paul, who was better inſtructed in the principles of the Goſpel of Chriſt than the ancient or the modern teachers of theſe doctrines can pretend to be, has thought fit to join them together, and has called upon all Chriſtians *to work out their own ſalvation,* for this very reaſon, becauſe *God works in them both to will and to do.* If St. Paul be in the right, God's working with us by his grace is ſo far from being a reaſon againſt working for ourſelves, that it is the greateſt inducement to it, and lays us under the higheſt obligation to *give all diligence to make our calling and election ſure.*

Let us then conſider St. Paul's doctrine, and ſee what are the natural conſequences for a Chriſtian to draw from it.

The words of the text evidently conſiſt of two parts; an exhortation, and an argument by which that exhortation is enforced. The exhortation you

have in theſe words, *Work out your own ſalvation with fear and trembling:* the argument to enforce it follows in the next words, *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleaſure.* An argument which may at firſt ſight ſeem rather to lead to confidence and aſſurance, than to fear and trembling: for if God be for us, who can be againſt us? or what is there to fear, or to tremble at, when we are thus ſupported and maintained in our ſpiritual warfare? And the argument is indeed applicable both ways, with reſpect to different kinds of fear. The diſciples of the Goſpel have many enemies to encounter with, many temptations to ſtruggle with; they are expoſed ſometimes to death, often to afflictions and perſecutions, and almoſt always to the hatred and contempt of the world. Now with reſpect to theſe adverſaries, the argument in the text may furniſh us with great confidence and aſſurance, and we may with the Apoſtle ſay, *Who ſhall harm you, if you be followers of that which is good?* for, notwithſtanding all the trials you are expoſed to, *God is able to keep you from falling, and to preſent you faultleſs before the preſence of his glory with exceeding joy.* But as there is a fear which reſpects our enemies, and is a fear of being conquered and brought into ſubjection by them; ſo likewiſe is there a fear which reſpects our friends, and is a fear of loſing their favour and aſſiſtance; and the more a man is dependent upon his friends, the greater is, and ought to be, his fear of loſing their protection: and this fear naturally inſpires us with diligence and care to obſerve and fulfil the commands of our great patrons, to ſtudy their humour

and inclination, and to conform ourſelves to them. And of this fear the Apoſtle ſpeaks in the text, *Work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling*; for it is a work that you are by no means ſufficient for of yourſelves; and therefore have a care how you forfeit the favour of him upon whom you entirely depend: *Of yourſelves ye can do nothing; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do.* That St. Paul intends this ſort and kind of fear, may be ſeen by his own way of reaſoning. In the beginning of this chapter, he preſſes humility upon the Philippians, he warns them againſt ſtrife and vainglory, and, after ſome arguments, drawn from the example of Chriſt and the great reward he obtained, to recommend humility to them, as if humility and fear, in the preſent caſe, were the ſame thing, he thus concludes; *Wherefore, my beloved, work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling.* If we believe that God works in us both to will and to do, it will make us humble, becauſe we can do nothing without him; for in ſuch a caſe what have we to be proud of? Weakneſs and a ſtate of dependence are inconſiſtent with confidence and preſumption: it will make us likewiſe fear and tremble, fear to diſpleaſe, and tremble to diſobey, him from whom cometh our ſalvation.

That this fear is the fear of offending God, and loſing his favour, is farther evident from the next verſe, *Do all things without murmurings and diſputings.* Now what fear is it that makes men obey cheerfully, without repining, without ſeeking for excuſes to free themſelves? Not the fear of puniſhment; for who grumble more than ſlaves? who repine more at

eir ſervice, or more readily ſeek and invent pre-
nces to decline the orders of their maſter? But
ere the fear that poſſeſſes the heart is the fear of
ſobliging a kind friend, or a beloved maſter, or a
tron upon whom we depend, there fear gives
ngs to obedience, and makes a man all ear and no
ngue, ready to receive but not diſpute the com-
and. The following verſe ſupplies us with the
e argument: the words are theſe, *That ye may be*
meleſs and harmleſs, or, as the margin reads it,
cere, the ſons of God, without rebuke. Now then
e fear the Apoſtle ſpeaks of is the fear of a ſon,
e fear of offending the father he loves; it is a fear
ich makes obedience blameleſs, and ſincere, and
thout rebuke; which no fear can do, but a fear of
ending him we love, and him we depend on.
her fears may make the hands or the feet obe-
nt; but this fear only reaches the heart, and
ders obedience perfect and ſincere.

The Chriſtian law indeed, like all other wiſe
vs, is fortified with rewards and puniſhments;
d theſe rewards and puniſhments God has pro-
ſed to us as motives of obedience, of that obedi-
ce which he has promiſed to accept and reward:
d therefore there is no doubt but that thoſe who
ey upon theſe motives, ſhall for their obedience
rewarded.

But this fear cannot here be meant: for, firſt,
will not agree with the Apoſtle's argument for
ring: for ſurely it is no reaſon to fear puniſh-
nt, that God works in us to will and to do; we
ould have much more reaſon to fear it, if he did
t: and this help and aſſiſtance of God is our

greateſt comfort and conſolation againſt ſuch fears. Secondly, *To work out his ſalvation with fear and trembling*, is the duty of every good Chriſtian. Now to fear puniſhment is a proper reſtraint upon the evil wills and affections of men, but it is no good man's duty; and yet to ſuch the Apoſtle ſpeaks, as we may ſee in the verſe of the text, *Ye have always obeyed, not as in my preſence only, but now much more in my abſence*; and by the character he gives them in the ſeventh verſe of the firſt chapter, *Both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the Goſpel, ye are all partakers of my grace.* Now to theſe good Chriſtians he ſays, *Work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling:* this he enjoins them as a thing not only highly becoming their condition, but as neceſſary to it. But the fear of puniſhment can never be neceſſary to any good man's condition, nor can it ever be made matter of precept or command. For the law is not made to inſtil the fear of puniſhment into men's hearts; nor is it the deſign of the lawgiver to ſpread fear and terror into the minds of his people: penalties are added to enforce obedience, and therefore concern not thoſe who are ready and willing to obey. It may be matter of wiſe admonition to Chriſtians to ſet before them the danger of diſobedience, and to exhort them with our bleſſed Lord, to *fear not thoſe who can only kill the body, but after that can do nothing; but to fear him who has power both over body and ſoul, and can throw them both into hell-fire:* but when do you ever find it enjoined, as matter of duty, to be afraid of hell? Is it any part of the good ſubject's obedience to live in perpetual apprehenſion of racks and gibbets, be-

cauſe racks and gibbets are provided for murderers and robbers? *Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?* ſays our Apoſtle, *do that which is good.* So that to fear the power, belongs not to him who does good. God has commanded all men to live righteouſly, and threatened ſevere puniſhment to thoſe who live otherwiſe; but he has no where commanded all men to live in fear of puniſhment: but the exhortation in the text belongs to all men, it belongs to the moſt perfect Chriſtians; and therefore the fear in the text is not the fear of puniſhment, which can neither be matter of command or exhortation to thoſe who do not want it, that is, to all good Chriſtians, who from the heart obey the truth. And this may ſerve to diſtinguiſh the fear and trembling mentioned in the text, from the fear which belongs to criminals and ſlaves; which fear, the Apoſtle tells us, *perfect love caſteth out.*

But ſince there is a fear and trembling neceſſary to the working out of our ſalvation, and which muſt, and ought to rule the affections of the beſt of men, let us conſider more diſtinctly the nature of this fear. Now the reaſon why we ought to fear, is, becauſe *God worketh in us both to will and to do:* let us examine then how far this argument goes, and that will ſhew us the nature of that fear which is the conſequence of it. To will and to do good, are the terms and conditions of our ſalvation; and therefore from whence we have the power to will and to do, from thence we have the means of ſalvation. Now ſalvation comprehends in it all the good we are capable of enjoying, without which our life is death, and our hope miſery: ſo that, if

we depend upon God to work in us both to will and to do, we depend upon him for all that is, or can be, valuable to man. And farther, *God worketh in us of his own good pleaſure:* we have no right or claim to his aſſiſtance; freely he gave, and freely he may take away, whenever he pleaſes. Now conſider yourſelf in this ſtate of dependence, and ſee what it is you have to fear. All your danger is in loſing the favour of God; and therefore for that too muſt be all your fear. Now this fear has more of care and ſolicitude in it, than of terror or amazement: for it is one thing to be afraid of a man, leſt he ſhould hurt you, and another thing to be afraid of loſing his favour: the firſt fear is terror, the laſt is carefulneſs. So that the text is parallel to that paſſage in St. Peter, *Give diligence to make your calling and election ſure.* St. Peter, you ſee, ſpeaks directly of the call and election of Chriſtians; but ſo far was he from thinking this call and this election to be abſolute, that he adviſes thoſe who have the call and election, to give all diligence to make them ſure; plainly teaching us, that though God has called and elected us in Chriſt, yet it depends on our own care to make them effectual to ſalvation. It is one certain way to forfeit the gifts of God, not to make uſe of them; for why ſhould he beſtow his gifts in vain? And therefore it is a great argument for diligence and application, that we depend not upon our own ſtrength, but the aſſiſtance and power of God. As for things which are entirely in our own power, it may poſſibly be more for our convenience, and as well for our buſineſs, to do them to-morrow as to-day: but no man will

n this hazard when the thing is in his power to-
y, but may be out of his power to-morrow. And
s is an argument for immediate care and in-
ſtry: God worketh in us when he thinks fit; and
erefore when he thinks fit you muſt work too;
his grace will not wait upon your humour, and
ready at your beck: and ſhould you neglect
e preſent opportunity, it may be your laſt;
ce you have no ſecurity but from his good will
d pleaſure; and to play with his offers, and neg-
t his call, is not the way to obtain them. There
no conſtant care without conſtant fear. A man
ll not be careful to perform what he is not afraid
loſe; and therefore, in this caſe, that which is
argument for care, is an argument for fear like-
ſe.

But farther, this fear ariſes from a ſenſe of our
n inſufficiency, and our dependence upon God:
t our inſufficiency is no reaſon why we ſhould be
aid of God. Becauſe I cannot help myſelf, it is
argument that I muſt be afraid of him that can:
d ſince God does help our weakneſs, it is great
ſon we ſhould love and adore him, but not that
ſhould dread and fear him. So that the fear
at ariſes from hence, is not in the leaſt degree in-
nſiſtent with the perfect love of God. For the
me reaſon that we ought to fear mightily, we
ght to love entirely, becauſe *God worketh in us*
th to will and to do of his good pleaſure. That it
of his good pleaſure that he aſſiſts us, is a great
idence of his love to us, and a great argument for
r love to him. Since then the cauſe of this fear
in ourſelves, for it ariſes from our own weakneſs

and inability; we ourſelves, properly ſpeaking, are the only objects of this fear. We cannot be afraid of God, becauſe he loves us and helps us; but we may well be afraid of ourſelves, leſt, being weak and fooliſh, as we are, we ſhould not uſe, as we ought to uſe, the manifold gifts and graces of God. Now then we are come to that which is indeed the good Chriſtian's fear, his conſtant fear; and that is, the fear of himſelf: *Let him that ſtandeth*, ſays the Apoſtle, *take heed leſt he fall.* There is no man ſo perfect, but that he ought to carry this fear about him; and where his fear points, there muſt his care and diligence be applied, that is, to himſelf ſtill: he muſt watch his paſſions and affections, leſt any of them break out into open enmity againſt God: his rebel heart muſt be guarded, leſt it quench the holy flame which God has kindled in it, leſt it do deſpite to the Spirit of God, which comes to dwell and inhabit in it. And this is a juſt and an holy fear, a fear which is not injurious to the love of God towards us; which carries in it no ſecret miſtruſt of his kindneſs or affection, nor is any blemiſh to our faith or hope in him: nay, it is a ſecurity to them all; it preſerves the love of God towards us, as it keeps us from thoſe offences which would alienate his love from us; it preſerves our faith and hope, by preſerving us from thoſe ſins which would deſtroy them, which would render our condition hopeleſs, and our faith vain. So likewiſe are the care and diligence, which proceed from this fear, free from any imputations of arrogance or preſumption. We ſet not up for ourſelves, as if our own arm could ſave us; but for this very reaſon we

are careful and diligent, becauſe of ourſelves we can do nothing: and therefore are we zealous and careful to make uſe of thoſe powers which God beſtows on us. We are always working, but not our own work; but we ſtrive to *abound in the work of the Lord*, as St. Paul expreſſes it: we hope to be rewarded for our labour, and yet not for our own, but, as the ſame Apoſtle aſſures us, *we know that our labour in the Lord is not in vain.* If we hope, we hope in the Lord; if we fear, we fear ourſelves. *Perfect love*, ſays St. John, *caſteth out fear*, that is, the fear of him whom we love. Nor is this fear, thus to be caſt out, the fear of God, for he is on our ſide: but a man's worſt enemies are they of his own houſehold; and therefore we juſtly fear our own hearts and affections, and over them is all our care, *that we may keep ourſelves unſpotted from the world.*

From this account of the nature of holy fear, it will be eaſy to explain what it is to *work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling.* God has given us many laws and commands, in obedience to which conſiſteth our ſalvation. He has promiſed us ſuch degrees of aſſiſtance, as ſhall enable us to perform the conditions required of us. To do the will of God, to walk in his laws, is to *work out our ſalvation.* This to do, under the aſſiſtance which God has given us, depends upon ourſelves: we can miſcarry in no point, but in this which is left to ourſelves. Here then all our diligence and care is neceſſary. We are prone to evil and miſchief, and it requires our conſtant application to ſecure ourſelves from falling under the dominion of luſt and wick-

edneſs: and therefore we muſt walk circumſpectly, watching and obſerving ourſelves; we muſt be jealous over our own hearts, for out of them *are the ſprings of life*, as the wiſe man tells us. This makes the Chriſtian ſtate to be a ſpiritual warfare; a ſtate of continual care and watchfulneſs, of fear and ſuſpicion: ſo that it is no leſs than conſtant employment for a man to walk uprightly with his God. This conſtant care can come from nothing, but a perſuaſion that it is neceſſary in our condition; and he that is well convinced of his own weakneſs will be perpetually afraid of miſcarrying; which fear will keep his diligence awake: ſo that *to work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling*, is, with the utmoſt care and diligence to ſet ourſelves to perform the will and commands of God, to be diligent *to make our calling and election ſure*.

There is, in the language made uſe of to explain the doctrine of grace, ſomething liable to be abuſed by ignorant or crafty men. We ſay, that of ourſelves we can do nothing; whence they conclude, that we have nothing to do. We ſay, that it is the grace of God which enables us to do every thing; from whence they conclude, that every thing muſt be left to the grace of God, and that we need only work ourſelves into a ſtrong perſuaſion that God is at work for us, and may ſit ſtill ourſelves. And this perſuaſion, which is generally mere enthuſiaſm, they dignify with the name of Chriſtian faith.

But let us try this language in a common caſe, and ſee whether it be ſo hard to be underſtood. Suppoſe a man wanted to move a weight, that required double his ſtrength to move it; would it not

be a very proper expreſſion to ſay, Of himſelf he could do nothing? or would it follow, that, if he was offered help, he ſhould ſit ſtill, and not put his own ſtrength to the work? If a friend came to his aſſiſtance, would it not be properly ſaid, that his friend enabled him to do what he did? but would it follow that his friend did all, and he nothing? I mention this only to guard men againſt being miſled by mere ſounds; and ſhall proceed now to conſider ſome conſequences of the doctrine and exhortation of the Apoſtle mentioned in the text.

And, firſt, it is evident, that the Chriſtian ſtate is not a ſtate of ſecurity; for ſecurity is inconſiſtent with any kind of fear and trembling, and is indeed a condition that does not call even for care or diligence. In a ſtate of ſecurity a man cannot even fear for himſelf; for, to be ſure of ſalvation, he muſt be ſure of every thing that is neceſſary to it; and therefore he muſt either be ſure that he is to have no part himſelf in working out his ſalvation; or, if he is to have any, he muſt be ſure and certain that he ſhall perform it: either of which excludes all manner of fear and trembling. Much leſs can he, who is ſecure of being ſaved, fear being puniſhed: ſo that there is no kind of fear left for him; and the Apoſtle's exhortation will have no meaning in it to ſuch a man. *Work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling:* with fear of what? ſince nothing is left to be afraid of. And yet to be ſure of our ſalvation has been made by ſome a neceſſary ſign of regeneration and adoption: and hence has proceeded the doctrine, that grace once received can never be loſt; and, if ſo, thoſe who have re-

ceived grace, can have no reaſon to fear and tremble. And yet it cannot be denied that the Philippians, to whom the Apoſtle writes, had received grace; ſince from his own teſtimony we learn, that *they had obeyed always*; *that in his bonds, and in the doctrine and confirmation of the Goſpel, they had been partakers of his grace.* Grace then they had received; what then had they to fear? if grace once received cannot be loſt, that is, if grace gives ſecurity of ſalvation. To make then the Apoſtle conſiſtent with himſelf, we muſt affirm, that it is his doctrine that grace may be loſt; and that even thoſe, who have made great progreſs in Goſpel obedience, are not ſecure of their ſtate; but muſt labour on, and work on with fear and trembling, leſt they come ſhort of the promiſes that they have received. And from hence we may comfort and ſupport good Chriſtians, under the many fears and miſgivings of mind that attend them in their ſpiritual warfare. That you fear, is no argument of miſtruſting God: we have reaſon to fear for ourſelves; nor will this fear be taken from us, till we are removed out of this world. Were there any reaſon to think, that ſecurity as to our future condition was among the gifts of God's Spirit to the true children of Chriſt, then indeed our fears would be matter of diſturbance to us: but, ſince the beſt muſt fear and tremble, why ſhould we diſquiet ourſelves becauſe we fear for ourſelves? ſince not only our preſent condition requires it, but it is even part of our ſecurity to fear, and to labour with care and diligence, which is the bleſſed fruit of holy fear. To fear that God will not perform his promiſes to

us, is a wicked fear: but to fear that we may fall ſhort of thoſe promiſes, is a reaſonable fear, our preſent weakneſs conſidered; and it is a ſpur to virtue. And thoſe who would deſire this thorn in the fleſh to be removed, may be anſwered, in the Lord's name, as he anſwered St. Paul, *My grace is ſufficient for you.* You are weak, but the Lord is ſtrong, and his ſtrength is perfected in weakneſs: ſo that, if your fear be active and buſy, and ſets you to work for the thing you are afraid to loſe, there is no doubt but that through Chriſt you ſhall be enabled to do all things.

Secondly, From hence we may learn what to think of the works of Chriſtians. It is, you ſee, the Apoſtle's command, *Work out your ſalvation.* Now then works are neceſſary to ſalvation; and it matters little in what degree they are neceſſary, or how they are to be named: if they are neceſſary, you muſt do them; and that is enough to ſecure the practice of virtue and holineſs in the world. And for this reaſon God works in us, that we may not only will, but do; that is, bring our good inclinations to perfection: for why does God work in us to will and to do, if willing and doing are not neceſſary to our redemption? And perhaps the good works of Chriſtians may not deſerve all the hard words that have ſo liberally been beſtowed on them, if we conſider that they are not the works of men, but of God; *for he worketh in us to will and to do:* and therefore our good works are the fruits of his Spirit; and are holy becauſe they proceed from an holy root, the power of God dwelling in us.

Laſtly, Hence likewiſe we may obſerve in what

manner God works with the faithful: St. Paul makes it an argument for fear and diligence. From whence it is evident, that God does not ſo work in us, as to exclude our own care and induſtry; that is, he does not work irreſiſtibly: for ſuppoſing God to work irreſiſtibly, the wit of man cannot make an argument out of it for private care and diligence. If God does every thing in us whether we will or no, what is left for us to do? or what have we to fear and tremble for, when God alone has undertaken the whole care and buſineſs of our redemption? The work of the Spirit upon the hearts of the faithful is to actuate and inſpire them: but to perform what is good is the buſineſs of him who is actuated and inſpired. Now it muſt be allowed, that it is one thing to give a man power to act, another to force him to act. A man's will is not influenced by his own power. He that has ten times the power to do a thing that I have, is nevertheleſs as free to let it alone as I am. And though the grace of God gives us great power and ability to work out our ſalvation, yet the power to will and to work is no conſtraint either to will or to work. And in this ſenſe the grace of God is a great argument for diligence and care: for, if he furniſhes us with power, it behoves us to ſee that we make a right uſe of it.

In a word then, you have the aſſiſtance of God to enable you to work; which is a great reaſon to love and truſt him, ſince he takes this care of you. Your danger now is only from yourſelf; it is in your own power, but in no other creature's under heaven, to defeat your hopes. You only can rob

yourſelf of the aſſiſtance of God by doing deſpite to his holy Spirit, by not obeying when it is in your power to obey. Be careful therefore, my brethren, be watchful over yourſelves; and, whilſt you have opportunity, *work out your ſalvation.*

DISCOURSE XIX.

LUKE xiii. 23, 24.

Then ſaid one unto him, Lord, are there few that be ſaved? And he ſaid unto them, Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate: for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.

THE fate of the world at the great day is ſo momentous a point, and in which every man, who is conſcious to himſelf that he is accountable for his actions, is ſo nearly concerned, that it is no wonder to find men in every age inquiſitive and curious to pry into this event. Hence have ariſen many nice ſpeculations concerning God's final judgment of mankind: ſometimes we are aſked, whether, conſiſtently with the declarations of the Goſpel, any of the heathen world can be ſaved; and ſometimes, whether, the ſtrictneſs of the Goſpel morality conſidered, and the viſible corruption of the world, it muſt not neceſſarily come to paſs that the far greater part of mankind ſhall periſh everlaſtingly.

One of theſe queſtions you ſee propoſed to our

Saviour in the text, *Lord, are there few that be ſaved?* You have alſo our Lord's anſwer in the text, and in the verſes which follow it in St. Luke: an anſwer applicable not only to this, but to all other queſtions of the like import; and which therefore very well deſerves your conſideration.

For the better underſtanding of which anſwer, we muſt conſider, whence it is that men, not content to examine themſelves by the law of God, and to learn from thence how their own caſe ſtands, are for launching out into the myſteries of God's judgments, and inquiring how it ſhall fare with this or that nation at the general judgment, and whether many or few ſhall be ſaved at the laſt.

Whoever will examine into the bottom of men's thoughts upon this ſubject, will find that the concluſion they make is commonly influenced by the conſideration of their own circumſtances. Every man in this caſe takes care of himſelf, and leaves the way open to his own ſalvation, how ſtrongly ſoever he bars it againſt others. The great advocates of election and reprobation always reckon themſelves in the number of the elect; and, that their iniquities, of which they are often conſcious, may not riſe up againſt them, they maintain that the act of man cannot make void the purpoſe of God, or the ſins of the elect deprive them of the benefit of God's eternal decree. Thus ſecured, they deſpiſe the virtues and moral attainments of all men, and doom them with all their virtues to deſtruction; whilſt they advance themſelves with all their ſins to a throne of glory prepared for them before the world began.

Akin to this was his conceit who aſked our Saviour the queſtion, *Are there few that ſhall be ſaved?* The Jews were God's peculiar people, and enjoyed very great privileges: *unto them were committed the oracles of God; to them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the ſervice of God, and the promiſes.* But, not content with theſe privileges, and being thus diſtinguiſhed by God, they will hardly allow God to have any thing to do with the reſt of the world, unleſs it were by ſevere judgments to afflict and to deſtroy them. With regard to theſe prejudices it is that St. Paul puts the queſtion to his countrymen, *Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not alſo of the Gentiles?* And we know full well that the Goſpel of Chriſt gave greater offence to the Jews in no one particular, than in opening the door of ſalvation to the Gentile world; they looked upon all nations, but their own, to be unclean, and accounted it *an unlawful thing for a man that was a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation:* and St. Peter was ſo poſſeſſed with this opinion, that he ſtood in need of a ſpecial warning from heaven, before he would baptize the honeſt centurion Cornelius. Upon the foot of this prejudice the queſtion is put to our Lord, *Are there few that ſhall be ſaved?* He who knew what was in man, and underſtood their ſecret thoughts, gave an anſwer which went to the bottom of the inquirer's heart, and without doubt touched him to the quick; *There ſhall,* ſays he, *be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth, when ye ſhall ſee Abraham and Iſaac and Jacob, and all the Prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourſelves thruſt out. And*

they ſhall come from the eaſt, and from the weſt, and from the north, and from the ſouth, and ſhall ſit down in the kingdom of God. And behold there are laſt which ſhall be firſt, and there are firſt which ſhall be laſt. This part of the anſwer was levelled directly againſt the Jewiſh prejudice, and is a plain declaration that the ſalvation of God ſhould be extended to eaſt and weſt, north and ſouth, to people of all parts of the world; and that many, who thought themſelves alone entitled to God's favour in virtue of their peculiar privileges, ſhould for their miſconduct and miſbehaviour be finally excluded from his preſence.

The controverſy which has been managed among Chriſtians, concerning the ſalvation of the heathen world, turns upon quite another point than the Jewiſh prejudice did. It carries not with it the ſame contempt of mankind. The Jews thought none worthy to be ſons of God but themſelves: Chriſtians think all worthy, and are deſirous that all ſhould be made partakers of the glory of God. The Jews thought no nation but their own capable of being received into the covenant of God, and therefore doomed all to deſtruction without remedy: the Chriſtian thinks every nation capable of being admitted into the covenant of Chriſt; his only doubt is, whether any nation, not received into the covenant, is capable of the benefits of it. But then conſidering the infinite numbers of men already dead, without any knowledge of the Goſpel, and the great number ſtill which probably will die in the ſame circumſtance; this notion entertained by ſome Chriſtians, with reſpect to ſuch perſons, ſeems to be as peremptory and relentleſs as the prejudice

f the Jews. And the limitation put upon God's nercy and goodneſs may be found perhaps to be as reſumptuous, and as injurious to the honour and najeſty of God in one caſe, as in the other. What hen muſt we ſay to ſuch inquirers as theſe? The nſwer in the text is given them both for their in-truction and their rebuke; *Strive to enter in at he ſtrait gate: for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek o enter in, and ſhall not be able.* As if our Lord ad ſaid, You ſeem, by your curioſity in inquiring fter the ſtate of others, to be ſecure and at eaſe bout your own. But turn your thoughts from thers to yourſelf: as great as your advantages nd privileges are, your way is ſtill ſtrait and arrow: ſtrive therefore and labour to ſecure our own entrance into life; for many of thoſe who have equal privileges with you, and profeſs o ſeek the kingdom of God, ſhall not enter nto it.

As the opinions hitherto mentioned confine the nercy of God within a narrow compaſs, and leave he greater part of mankind under deſperate cir-umſtances; ſo there is another which goes into he contrary extreme, and ſets the doors of heaven pen to all comers, with little or no regard to the lifferent qualifications of men. They who can nake no title to the kingdom of God under the erms of the Goſpel, or by the rules of virtue and norality, not willing to give themſelves up to de-truction, have perſuaded themſelves and others, hat it is impoſſible that God ſhould finally doom o miſery ſo many of his creatures, as muſt neceſ-arily ſuffer if they are to be judged by the ſtrict

rules of morality, or the no leſs ſtrict rules of the Goſpel. And having no hope but in the mercy of God, no excuſe but in the infirmities and weakneſſes of human nature, neceſſity makes them eloquent upon this ſubject; and the fineſt things are ſaid to diſplay the goodneſs of God, and ſet it forth in the livelieſt colours; and to repreſent the diſtreſs of nature, and the utter inability of man to do good in this fallen degenerate ſtate. Thus concluding all men under ſin, they hope to eſcape in the crowd: it would be inexorable cruelty, they think, to make all, or moſt men miſerable; and therefore, let God be good, and all men be ſinners, and they are ſafe.

To ſuch inquirers as theſe, we ſay, that they miſtake in all their reckoning: for, if it be juſt to puniſh ſinners, no reaſon can be given why twenty ſhould not be puniſhed as well as ten, or an hundred as well as twenty. There were ſinners enough in the world to have ſaved the world at the general deluge, if numbers would have done. When Sodom was deſtroyed, ten righteous men would have ſaved the city; but the number of the wicked was never pleaded in bar of juſtice. Neither does the race of men make ſo conſiderable a figure in the ſyſtem of the univerſe, as to endanger the whole, if they miſcarry. Let men be ſinners, yet God will not want thoſe who will ſerve and obey him: or, if he ſhould, let him ſpeak the word, and millions will ariſe at his command: *Think not therefore to ſay within yourſelves, We have Abraham to our Father; for God is able of theſe ſtones to raiſe up children unto Abraham.* If all men ſhould forſake him, he can, when he pleaſes, repair the loſs: he is not ſo weak, or in ſuch

want of the ſervice of men, as to be guided by ſuch politic reaſons as oftentimes, reaſonably enough, prevail with temporal princes to ſpare an offending multitude. Leave therefore the reſt of the world to the judgment and mercy of God, and mind you the law that is ſet before you as the condition of life, and *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate.*

You ſee by this account, that our Saviour did not think fit to anſwer the curioſity of this inquirer: and, ſince he declined the queſtion, who alone was able to reſolve it, it is abſurd to aſk the queſtion of any body elſe; and it is great preſumption in any body elſe to pretend to anſwer it. From natural religion we may learn much of the equity and juſtice of God, and of the terms of obedience upon which we may hope to partake of his mercy: but how many, or how few, will act by the laws of reaſon, and qualify themſelves for the mercy of God, natural reaſon and religion can never ſhew. Nor is there any reaſon to expect a reſolution of this doubt in the books of Scripture; for had it been a piece of knowledge proper to be communicated to us, why was it not declared by our Lord, when the queſtion was ſo fairly ſtated to him? or why does he give ſuch an anſwer here, as is plainly calculated not to ſatisfy the curioſity of mankind in this great point, but to reſtrain and to rebuke it? The queſtion is, *Are there few that be ſaved?* The anſwer is in effect, What is that to you? mind your own buſineſs, and *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate.*

Two things there are, in which every man has a right to require ſatisfaction, and without which he can upon no reaſonable grounds pretend to reli-

gion: one relates to the method of God's dealing with mankind, and comes to this point, Whether all men are capable; and, if not all, who are capable of ſalvation? The other relates to our own conduct and behaviour, and reſolves itſelf into this inquiry, Upon what terms we may expect ſalvation? Now, as to theſe two neceſſary inquiries, our Saviour is ſo far from avoiding them, that he has expreſsly and clearly determined them. As to the firſt, he has told us, that ſalvation belongs to all men, of every country and nation; and that the kingdom of heaven is open to receive thoſe who come from the eaſt and weſt, from the north and ſouth. As to the ſecond, he declares, that all the workers of iniquity will be excluded from the preſence of God; and therefore exhorts us to *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate:* and, to quicken our diligence, and to raiſe in us a concern equal to the intereſt we have at ſtake, he informs us farther, *that many who will ſeek to enter, ſhall not be able.* Being thus far inſtructed, what farther demand have you upon your teachers? Would you know before-hand what your lot will be? and whether you ſhall be in the number of thoſe who ſhall ſeek and find, or among thoſe who would enter in, but ſhall not be able? What has a teacher of religion to do in this matter? Is it ever expected of a lawgiver, that he ſhould tell who will obey and be happy, and who will tranſgreſs the law and be puniſhed? Nay, what has a learner in religion to do with this point? Do you want to be made either careleſs or deſperate? Is either ſtate a deſirable one to a man diſpoſed to be ſeriouſly religious? But you may think perhaps

it it would have another effect upon you; that will give great eaſe and ſatisfaction to your mind, be ſecure as to your future condition, and en-e you with great cheerfulneſs to bear all the rdſhips and diſcouragements to which virtue nds expoſed. I am indeed perſuaded that this ect would often follow; that many righteous uld be reſolutely righteous, and act with views ove this world, and as citizens of another coun-, upon certain aſſurance given them of future ory. But conſider, the terms upon which we are be happy in another world muſt be ſuch as are nſiſtent with our ſtate and condition in this. It impoſſible to imagine it to be reaſonable for God place us in this world, and then to give ſuch pes of another, as ſhould render us unfit to ſup-rt the ſeveral characters impoſed on us here. nd it is much to be doubted whether the beſt en would not be rendered uſeleſs to this world by ch ſecurity given for their own future happineſs ſome ſeem to deſire. They would probably be ft in the proſpect of their own future happineſs, nd grow ſtupid to the world, and act as if they d, in the literal ſenſe, hate father and mother, other and ſiſter: whereas now the ſenſe of reli-on under which they live, the neceſſity they now themſelves to be under to work out their wn ſalvation, obliges them to diſcharge all the fices and duties of life regularly and honourably; nce there is no way of ſecuring our happineſs in nother world, but by doing all the good we can this.

And if this ſort of knowledge would probably

render good men uſeleſs to the world, it would certainly render bad men exceedingly pernicious to it. Deſpair is the height of madneſs; and were all bad men to be made mad and outrageous, it would perhaps be hard to find keepers to guard them, and to protect the reſt of mankind from their fury. To live amongſt men who knew themſelves deſtined to eternal miſery, what elſe would it be but living among the damned, and being expoſed to all their malice and revenge, made ten times more malicious and revengeful by their deſpair?

But if it can ſerve no good purpoſe to communicate to us this knowledge with reſpect to ourſelves, and our own future ſtate and condition, what purpoſe can it poſſibly ſerve to give us this knowledge with reſpect to others, and their future condition? What is it to us to know the exact proportion between the good and bad, or to know how many or how few ſhall finally miſcarry? Would this knowledge alter our own condition in any reſpect? Would it affect the terms of our obedience, or make it eaſier for us to work out our own ſalvation? If not, to what purpoſe is it deſired? unleſs perhaps you ſecretly imagine that God means not to execute his threatenings againſt ſinners, but will ſave all at the laſt; and you want to be let into this ſecret, that you may ſin without fear. If this be indeed your caſe, do you not ſee that your curioſity is irreligious, and ſprings from a corrupted heart, which wants to be freed from the fear of hell, only to enjoy the pleaſure of ſin? And can you ſtill wonder why God does not gratify ſuch a curioſity as this, and reveal the ſecret myſteries of his provi-

dence, to encourage you in vice and immorality? It wants but little reflection in this caſe to ſee that the reaſon why this knowledge is deſired, is a very good reaſon why it ſhould not be granted.

In general, it is very abſurd to expect that judgment ſhould go before trial: and therefore, as this life is a ſtate of trial, and is naturally to be followed by a day of judgment, it is unnatural to declare the final ſtate of men before their trial is over; and with reſpect to any judgment, but the judgment of God, it is impoſſible; for no other juſt judge can tell what his ſentence will be before the trial is over.

The ſcope which men give to their imaginations upon this ſubject, when they leave their only ſure guide, the word of God, is always dangerous, and oftentimes fatal to them. If you are contented to take God's word for the method he intends to purſue in the judging of the world, you will ſoon ſee, that, in order to be happy, you muſt be good. If you want reſtraint, the threatenings of God are terrible: if you want comfort, the promiſes of the Goſpel are the only proper cordial for penitent ſinners. Thus will you find yourſelf equally guarded againſt preſumption and deſpair, ſo long as you follow the light of God's word. But if you indulge your own conceit, and imagine that God will be either better or worſe to you than he has declared, you expoſe yourſelf to manifeſt peril. If in the gaiety of your heart you imagine God means little by his threatenings, and made uſe of them only to deter men from vice, without ever intending a rigorous execution, it is very probable that you will

take advantage of your own diſcovery, and abate as much in your own goodneſs, as you do in God's ſeverity. If you are of a colder conſtitution, and more inclined to melancholic thoughts, your imagination will ſhew you God clothed only with terrors; and your heart, oppreſſed with fear, will ſink, and leave you no courage to go on with the duties of religion, from which your fears will ſuffer you to have no hope or expectation.

If you extend your thoughts farther, and lay ſchemes for the general judgment of the world, it is well if this unneceſſary concern for others does not prove prejudicial to yourſelf. If you confine the mercies of God to yourſelf and your own ſect only, it is an opinion which not only aſcribes great partiality to God, but it tends to introduce cruelty and inhumanity into the temper of every man ſo perſuaded. We eaſily come to think it a virtue to hate thoſe whom God hates: and then the conſequence is, that there muſt be a ſtop to all intercourſe of good offices with all men, the few only excepted who think as we think. And thus, by paſſing a raſh judgment in a dark myſterious point, and which of all others does leaſt concern us, we ſhall extinguiſh the nobleſt grace of the Goſpel, the plaineſt duty of a Chriſtian, and which of all others does moſt affect the peace and happineſs of mankind.

If, in honour to the mercy of God, you open the doors of heaven to men of all profeſſions in the world, who live well according to the meaſure of light beſtowed on them; though your opinion has in it much more humanity and more common ſenſe

than that before mentioned, yet, by thus dealing to all indifferently graces and mercies which are not in your diſpoſal, it is well if you do not hazard your own ſhare. It is this opinion, if I am not deceived, that leads many into contempt of the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus: for, when they think all religions equally good, and all men equally ſecure who follow their religion, be it what it will, they raiſe unawares a queſtion which they cannot anſwer, namely, To what purpoſe was the Goſpel given? For, if all men are equally ſecure under all religions, what can be the advantage of one religion above another? When men are led into this inextricable maze, by ſetting up themſelves for judges of the world, they know not where to fix: they loſe all regard to the beſt and pureſt religion, by doing ſuch profeſſed and undeſerved honour to the worſt.

You ſee then how uſeleſs, how dangerous a thing it is, to go out of our way to meddle with things ſo far above us. If you would reſolve to take care of one, that reſolution would furniſh you with ſufficient employment: for, be your advantages ever ſo great, yet all who have your advantages will not be ſaved; for of thoſe who ſeek to enter, many will not be able; and many, of whom you little think, may perhaps go before you; for God has thoſe whom he will own, in the eaſt, and the weſt, and the north, and the ſouth. Leave him to find out thoſe whom he will honour, and look you to the point which is indeed your true, your only concern, the ſalvation of your own ſoul, and *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate.*

DISCOURSE XX.

LUKE xii. 48.

Unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will aſk the more.

THE equity of this general rule is ſo apparent to common ſenſe, that it admits of no diſpute, and calls for no explanation. A ſingle mite offered by a poor widow is a preſent fit for the King of heaven, which from the hand of a rich man would hardly be a decent charity to a poor widow. And thus the caſe is in all inſtances to which the rule is applicable.

But plain as this general maxim is, yet we are very apt to miſtake in the application of it to particular caſes: for then ſelf-love and ſelf-intereſt will not permit us to diſcern that true proportion of one thing to another, from which the equity of the rule ariſes. If we have any claim to make in our own behalf, we think nothing too much, and are apt to overrate the ability of the perſon upon whom we have the demand, and to expect from him much more than he in reaſon ought to grant: if any claim be upon us, we are ready enough to excuſe ourſelves, to diſſemble, or to undervalue our power, and conſequently to do leſs than may in reaſon and juſ-

tice be required from us. Hence it is that we are rarely pleaſed with thoſe who are above us, and ſeldom able to ſatisfy thoſe who are below us.

As this rule has place in the intercourſe of all the offices of life, ſo ought it eſpecially to influence the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments: but the weakneſs and wickedneſs of men have almoſt totally excluded it from human judicatures. For as it is in every body's power to pretend ignorance of the law, or ſome other inability, in excuſe for the crimes for which they are to anſwer; were the plea as eaſily admitted as it is pleaded, it would open a door to all kind of licentiouſneſs, and take off the fear of puniſhment, which is ſo neceſſary a reſtraint upon the depraved inclinations of men: and ſince the wiſeſt and ableſt judges cannot diſcern, ſome few caſes perhaps excepted, between real and affected ignorance; or ſo diſtinguiſh the powers and abilities of one man from another, as to proportion rewards and puniſhments according to this rule; therefore the law puts all, except thoſe who are manifeſtly deficient in reaſon, upon the ſame level, and ſuppoſes every man to know the law of his country; and conſequently, where a malicious act is proved, a malicious intention is implied, and the criminal is ſentenced accordingly.

But how juſtifiable ſoever this proceeding is, upon the neceſſity there is for it in order to maintain ſome tolerable degree of peace and quiet in the world; yet it is evident that theſe general preſumptions, upon which all human judicatures proceed, do not leave room for an exact diſtribution of juſtice; but it often happens, that men are made equal

in the puniſhment, whoſe crimes, could all circumſtances be conſidered, were not equal.

But could you introduce a judge endowed with the perfect knowledge of men's hearts, there would be an end of all ſuch general preſumptions: he would do in every caſe what was exactly right and equitable; and the only ſtanding rule of the court would be that of the text, *Unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required.*

One ſuch court there is in whihc he who knows the ſecrets of every heart will ſit judge himſelf; before whoſe tribunal there will want no evidence to convict the guilty, no advocates to defend the innocent: there no pretended excuſe will be admitted, no real one excluded: there every man with all his actions, with all his talents and abilities, and all his opportunities of knowing the will of God, will be weighed in the balance; and *unto whom much was given, of him ſhall much be required.*

Since then we are to be judged, and finally ſentenced, by this rule, it concerns us to be careful in the application of it to ourſelves; for if we miſtake, we ſhall gain only a deceitful ſecurity, and which at the laſt will prove fatal: and there is the more reaſon for this care, conſidering how apt men are to make unreaſonable allowances to themſelves, where their own intereſt is concerned.

It is no uncommon thing for men who have no hopes of being juſtified by the terms of the Goſpel, to take ſhelter in this general declaration, and to imagine that they ſee an equity in their own caſe, which ſhall ſtand between them and the rigorous execution of the Goſpel law. When they read in

the New Teſtament, that all whoremongers and adulterers, all drunkards and riotous perſons, all extortioners and fraudulent dealers, in a word, all who in any manner injure their neighbours and fellow creatures, ſhall without doubt periſh everlaſtingly; they plainly perceive that the crimes and the puniſhment are ſo inſeparably annexed, that, being conſcious of the crimes, they have no way to ward off the puniſhment. But when they read, that *unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall much be required*, and infer from thence, that unto whomſoever little is given, of him ſhall little be required; they immediately conclude, that all their errors and miſtakes, of what kind ſoever, are well ſecured: for whoever is in error, be it through want of underſtanding, or of the external means of knowledge, or be it through paſſion and prejudices, does, ſo long as the error continues, want the light, and is ſo far to be conſidered as one to whom little is given. This is one ſtep towards their juſtification: but ſtill conſcience remains, and proves that they had the light in many inſtances in which they have been offenders. But then they conſider, that to render a man accountable for his actions, it is not enough that he knows the terms of his duty, he muſt alſo have power to put them in execution: for no man ought to be puniſhed for not acting, who never had it in his power to act, or for doing what was not in his power to avoid doing. Being thus far advanced, they recollect all the temptations and incitements they met with, and how ſtrongly their paſſions were moved to the commiſſion of thoſe iniquities of which their conſcience accuſes them; and, being

ges diſpoſed to favour the criminal, they con-
le, it was not in their power to do otherwiſe
ı they did; and ſince ſo little was given them,
y ſhall be anſwerable but for little: and thus
ıred, they imagine they may ſafely appear before
judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, and plead to him his
ı rule of equity againſt all the peremptory laws
ıis Goſpel.

ıllow this plea, and it will indeed juſtify all men,
leave no room for judgment; but it muſt re-
t great diſhonour and reproach on him who
le them, and has declared to them a judgment
ome, as well by the reaſon which he has given
n, as by the revelation which he has publiſhed.
'ew men are ſo eſſentially wicked as to chooſe
kedneſs for its own ſake; either error or paſſion
leaded in all caſes. The Canaanites, who wor-
ıped the work of men's hands, were greatly in
ır; and the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and
norrah had ſtrong unnatural paſſions: but theſe
fire from heaven, and thoſe by the ſword of
ıua, were rooted out. Which part now would
take? Were they ſinners, or was the Judge of
he world unjuſt?

f men are really of ſuch a make, that their paſ-
ı are too ſtrong for their reaſon, and reaſon of
uſe but to contrive means for the ſatisfaction of
paſſions and appetites; it is impoſſible to juſtify
l in giving ſuch creatures any notion of a judg-
ıt to come: for to what purpoſe does it ſerve
to plague and torment them unneceſſarily? And
is it reconcileable with the goodneſs of God,
ılant ſuch ſeeds of miſery in our very nature?

to arm the little reaſon we have againſt us, which is perpetually placing fears and terrors before us, which yet have, can have, no relation to us?

In order to clear this matter, there are two things proper to be conſidered:

Firſt, To what inſtances this rule of the text is extended by our bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles.

Secondly, How far we may extend and apply this rule by parity of reaſon to other caſes.

That we may bring this inquiry within proper bounds, it is fit to obſerve, in the firſt place, that the rule of the text is never applied in Scripture to extenuate or excuſe immoral actions upon account of the violence of the temptation from whence they proceed. So far from it, that even indulging the paſſion is imputed as ſin, though the immoral wicked action does not enſue: *He that hateth his brother*, ſays an Apoſtle, *is a murderer*; and *he that looketh upon a woman to luſt after her*, ſays our bleſſed Saviour, *hath already committed adultery with her in his heart*. If the caſe be ſo, if hatred has in it the guilt of murder, and luſt has the guilt of adultery; how ſhall murder be excuſed becauſe it proceeds from violent hatred, or adultery becauſe it proceeds from violent luſt? St. James has plainly condemned the profaneneſs of juſtifying our iniquities by accuſing our conſtitutions, and conſequently by accuſing him who made us: *Let no man ſay when he is tempted I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed. Then when luſt hath conceived, it bringeth forth ſin: and ſin, when it is finiſh-*

h forth death, James i. 13, 14, 15. All ſin
ſcribed to be the effect of violent and in-
uſt and paſſion: but this is ſo far from
ſidered as an excuſe for ſin, that it im-
follows, that ſin ſo produced *bringeth forth*
he Scripture has recorded to us the im-
ions of many perſons; but is there any
vhere ſuch immoralities are pitied or ex-
uſe of the luſt and paſſions from whence
eded? Nay, however apt men are to make
ſes for themſelves, they are not apt to
n for others. When you read that Ahab
oth, are you apt to ſay, Poor man, how
help it, for he longed extremely for his
When you read that David ſlew Uriah
pted his wife, do you excuſe his iniquity,
is paſſion was ſtrong? If you do, it is
n he did for himſelf; for when he came
, he cried, *I have ſinned againſt the Lord:*
e ſorrowful confeſſion of his iniquity was
ouſand of the excuſes which men uſually
ike caſes. In the verſes before the text,
r puts the caſe of thoſe who have received
l of thoſe who have received leſs: of thoſe
ived leaſt he ſays, *They ſhall be beaten* for
gs *worthy of ſtripes:* by which it appears,
ho have ſenſe to diſtinguiſh between good
are ſubject to judgment; and no hope is
n of being ſaved by the ſtrength of their paſ-
n they act againſt the light of their reaſon.
re will be occaſion to conſider this parti-
n, in ſtating the caſe or caſes to which the
e text is applied in Scripture.

Now the rule, as applied in Scripture, does chiefly concern thoſe who enjoy the light of God's word, and have the advantages of the Goſpel to enable them to work out their ſalvation: theſe are they who are ſaid in the text *to have received much:* and the compariſon lies between them, and the reſt of the world who have the light of reaſon only to direct them; and theſe laſt mentioned, compared with the others, are they *who have received little.*

The caſe of theſe two ſorts of people is very accurately ſtated in the verſes before the text, which muſt therefore be conſidered. *That ſervant,* ſays our bleſſed Saviour, *which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes. For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall much be required.*

The caſe, you ſee, is put with reſpect to ſinners under the different circumſtances of knowing, and not knowing, the will of their Lord. What we are to underſtand by the *will of their Lord* will appear, if we conſider, that they who *knew not* the will of their Lord are yet ſuppoſed here to *do things worthy of ſtripes*; which ſuppoſes them to have the light of reaſon, and a knowledge of the difference between good and evil: for no man can in a moral ſenſe be ſaid to do things worthy of ſtripes, unleſs he has reaſon to diſtinguiſh between the things which are, and which are not, worthy of ſtripes. Since therefore they who have this light of reaſon are yet ſuppoſed *not to know their Lord's will,* it is evident that *to know the will of our Lord* implies ſomething more

than having the light of reaſon to direct us; and conſequently muſt mean our having the light of God's word for our direction.

Secondly, You ſee that ſinners under all circumſtances are condemned to puniſhment. They who knew their Lord's will are condemned for not doing *according to his will:* they who knew not his will are not condemned for not doing according to the rule of which they had no knowledge, but they are ſentenced for committing things *worthy of ſtripes*, that is, ſuch things as they, according to the light they had, knew to be ſinful. And this agrees exactly with what St. Paul to the Romans has declared: *As many as have ſinned without law, ſhall alſo periſh without law: and as many as have ſinned in the law, ſhall be judged by the law.*

But then, as the knowledge of God's will is a great advantage to thoſe who know it, ſo will their puniſhment be in proportion greater, if they offend againſt this knowledge: they therefore *ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.* Others, though their iniquities and offences againſt the light of reaſon, which God gave them, ſhall not go unpuniſhed; yet ſhall their puniſhment be mitigated in reſpect to what others muſt endure, and *they ſhall be beaten but with few ſtripes.*

This general determination agrees with a more particular one to be found in the chapter before the text; *Wo unto thee, Chorazin! wo unto thee, Bethſaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented in ſackcloth and aſhes. But it ſhall*

be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you, Luke x. 13, 14.

Tyre and Sidon were cities diſtinguiſhed in the Jewiſh prophets for their great abominations and iniquities; and the Jews, it is likely, thought that it would fare worſe with none at the day of judgment than with thoſe cities. But our Saviour tells them it ſhould fare worſe with the cities which had ſeen his mighty wonders, and yet refuſed to repent at his call. Which judgment of his was far from juſtifying or excuſing the iniquities of Tyre and Sidon, or giving any promiſe of impunity to their ſins: it ſuppoſes them to be reſerved to great judgments, and threatens ſtill ſeverer puniſhment to thoſe, who under greater advantages were equal ſinners.

Conſider now the world as divided into two parts; one whereof has had the oracles of God committed to them, and enjoyed the light and direction of his word; and the other has been left to the guidance of mere reaſon and nature, and that knowledge of good and evil to which no rational creature can be an utter ſtranger; and you may, from the maxim of the text, learn theſe general truths with reſpect to each ſort and condition of men:

Firſt, That no man ſhall be judged by a law of which he had no knowledge, but every man ſhall ſtand or fall by the light that was given him: it being true of every moral action, what St. Paul has affirmed of almſgiving, *It ſhall be accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*

Secondly, That immoral actions admit of no excuſe, but will ſubject every man to the judgment of God. For morality not being founded primarily upon the authority of revelation, but upon that reaſon which is a common gift to mankind, every man muſt anſwer for the uſe of his own reaſon: and where reaſon ſhews him the difference of good and evil, if he chooſes the evil he is without excuſe. There is no juſtification, no excuſe, to be offered for ſin in this caſe: it is in vain to plead paſſion or temptation, for reaſon was given for this very purpoſe, to govern paſſion: and the ſubmitting to paſſion and temptation againſt the light of reaſon is the very depravity and corruption of heart that calls for vengeance: and therefore to plead paſſion as an excuſe for acting againſt your reaſon, is to plead your own iniquity as a reaſon why you ſhould not be puniſhed. This rule laid down by St. James is deciſive in this point, *To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is ſin.*

It may be ſaid perhaps, that the notions of morality differ in different places; and that, through the power and force of cuſtom and education, the things which appear to ſome to be worthy of ſtripes, appear to others in another light, and to have nothing criminal in them. Be it ſo: for I mean not to conteſt this piece of hiſtory at preſent. But yet, I ſay, this avails not in the preſent argument, nor affords any advantage to them who ſeek to excuſe iniquity by pleading paſſion and infirmity. Where there is no conſciouſneſs of ſin, there is no room to look out for excuſes: and therefore whatever allowance may be made to thoſe,

who in ſuch unhappy circumſtances ſin without knowledge; yet certain it is, that all who contrive excuſes for themſelves can have no advantage of this circumſtance: for the very making an excuſe ſhews the conſciouſneſs of ſin, and is a conviction that you have in your own opinion committed things worthy of ſtripes. How fooliſh a thing then is it to loſe the proſpect of pardon, by deceiving yourſelf into an opinion that you do not want one? Such ſins may be forgiven through repentance, but no art, no wit of man will ever juſtify them.

Thirdly, It appears from this determination made by our bleſſed Saviour, that all who know the will of God, and live under the light of his Goſpel, ſhall, whether they like it or whether they like it not, be finally judged according to the Goſpel. The rule is peremptory; *All who know the will of their Lord, and prepare not themſelves, nor do according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.* Men act ſometimes as if they thought it were in their own power to chooſe what law they would be judged by. As ſoon as they profeſs natural religion, they look upon themſelves to have no farther concern with the Goſpel, but ſeem ſatisfied that they ſhall be judged by their own notions. But if the Goſpel of Chriſt be indeed, as indeed it is, the will of God, it will not be ſo eaſily parted with. It is the law of our great Maſter, and obey it we muſt. The advice of a friend we may uſe or refuſe, as we think fit; but the laws of our ſuperiors muſt be obeyed. True, you will ſay, ſuppoſing it to be the law of our ſuperior; but that is the very thing which you cannot admit. Look well to it, that this

perſuaſion be not your crime: the people of Chorazin and Bethſaida did not believe in Chriſt Jeſus; yet the evidence placed before their eyes was ſuch, that their diſbelief was the very circumſtance which rendered their caſe more deplorable than that of Tyre and Sidon. The people of Jeruſalem were alſo unbelievers; yet ſuch was their unbelief, that at laſt the things which made for their peace were hid from their eyes. Here then is your caſe: you have the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus before you; it claims your obedience upon no ſlight credentials; it was introduced by greater works than ever man did; it was ſealed with the blood of its great author, and has been handed down to you by thoſe who ſacrificed all that was dear to them in the world in confirmation of its truth. Think not then that it can be an indifferent matter whether you receive or reject this law; or that it matters not by what light you walk, ſince you expect ſo much equity from God that he will judge you according to the light you have: for if the Goſpel be the law of God offered to you, as it certainly is, and you are in the number of thoſe *unto whom much was given, of you therefore ſhall much be required.*

The mercy of God offered to you in the Goſpel through Chriſt Jeſus is a call to repentance from dead works: it is a ſummons to you, to turn to the living God in works of righteouſneſs and holineſs. When John the Baptiſt gave notice of the near approach of our bleſſed Lord, the ſum of his doctrine was, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Our Saviour and his diſciples introduce the Goſpel with the ſame warning; and St. Paul teaches,

that God, who winked at the times of ignorance, now, under the Goſpel, *calleth all men every where to repentance*; *and hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs.* If then the great promiſes made through Chriſt Jeſus belong only to penitents, who forſake ſin, and turn to God in newneſs of heart, how ſadly do men impoſe upon themſelves, who truſt to be ſaved by God's mercy, without doing the work of God, and continue in ſin in hopes that grace may abound? Little do they conſider, that thoſe falſe preſumptuous hopes will prove in the end great and real aggravations of their iniquity. To ſin in hopes of mercy, is abuſing the mercy of God, and making the goodneſs of our heavenly Father a reaſon for diſobeying him. To plead the death or merits of Chriſt in excuſe or in juſtification of iniquity, will ſo little avail, that it will amount to a condemnation out of our own mouths. *Chriſt died to deſtroy the works of the devil, to redeem us from ſin, to ſanctify an elect people to God:* every Chriſtian knows this, or may know it, if he looks into his Bible. Conſider now what the plea in excuſe for ſin amounts to: in the mouth of a Chriſtian it muſt come to this; I know that Chriſt died to deſtroy ſin, but I will keep my ſins, and truſt in his death: I know that the promiſes of God are made to thoſe only who forſake their evil deeds; but I will depend on his promiſes for the pardon of my evil deeds, though I forſake them not. Theſe are the perſons, who, by abuſing Chriſt and his redemption, do put him to open ſhame in the world, and, in the language of the Apoſtle, *do crucify to themſelves afreſh the Son of God.* Happy had it been

for ſuch men, had they been born in the darkeſt corners of the earth, to which the glad tidings of the Goſpel never came: then they might have pleaded ignorance, and weakneſs, and want of the knowledge of God's will; but now they live, and act, and reaſon like heathens in the noon-day light of the Goſpel. And what can be the conſequence of ſuch a life, and ſuch a knowledge, but this only, *that they ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes?*

As to ourſelves, we have great reaſon to bleſs God daily, that by his good providence we have been born and educated in a Chriſtian country; that we have been admitted into the church of his bleſſed Son, and have had betimes the means of knowledge and of grace communicated to us: but let us take heed that we do not turn theſe bleſſings into curſes upon ourſelves by our abuſing them. Theſe are great talents which our bleſſed Lord has intruſted us with, if we uſe them as we ought: if we improve them to the glory of God, and the good of them about us, happy will it be for us, and we ſhall one day hear that bleſſed ſentence, *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* But if we neglect theſe great opportunities of ſalvation which God now affords, they will one day riſe up in judgment againſt us, and condemn us. And it ſhall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in that day, than for wicked Chriſtians who were redeemed by the croſs of Chriſt, but who accounted the blood of the covenant a vain thing; who were ſanctified by the Holy Ghoſt, but did deſpite to the Spirit of God; who were bought with a price to be the ſervants of God, but who ſold themſelves for ſlaves to iniquity.

Lay hold therefore, my brethren, of the mercy of God, while the day of mercy laſts; for, if you neglect or deſpiſe the goodneſs of God, which calleth us to repentance, this will be your condemnation, that *light is come into the world, and you choſe darkneſs rather than light.*

DISCOURSE XXI.

LUKE iv. 1, 2.

nd Jeſus, being full of the Holy Ghoſt, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderneſs, being forty days tempted of the devil.

AFTER our Saviour had waſhed his diſciples' eet, and wiped them with a towel, *he ſaid unto them, now ye what I have done to you?* None anſwering is queſtion, he explained to them himſelf the eaning of what he had done: *Ye call me*, ſays he, *aſter, and Lord: and ye ſay well; for ſo I am. If then, your Lord and Maſter, have waſhed your feet, alſo ought to waſh one another's feet. For I have iven you an example, that you ſhould do as I have one to you. Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, the ſervant not greater than his Lord, neither he that is ſent, reater than he that ſent him. If ye know theſe things, appy are ye if ye do them.* Should you aſk the like ueſtion concerning the hiſtory in the text, our Saiour's temptation in the wilderneſs, and ſay, What this that has been done unto him? How came ie Son of God to be thus inſulted by the powers of arkneſs? Whence aroſe the tempter's confidence nd power? or why were conſummate virtue and nocence ſubmitted to this proof and trial? You

might be anſwered in like manner alſo, *He hath given us an example, that we ſhould do as he hath done.* Were you to hear the complaints, which even good men often make, that they are forced to ſtruggle with many and with great temptations; that the paths of virtue are ſlippery and inſecure, beſet with many dangers; and that their prayers to be delivered from their trials come empty back, and bring no bleſſing with them; you might in our Saviour's name and in his words expoſtulate the caſe with them: *Ye call me Lord and Maſter: and ye ſay well; for ſo I am. If I then, your Lord and Maſter,* have been perfected through trials, and in all things tempted even like unto you, whence come your complaints? whence is it that you expect to be exempted from that condition to which I willingly ſubmitted? *The ſervant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is ſent greater than he that ſent him.* I have led the way, and ſhewn you how to conquer: and *if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

Since theſe things therefore are written for our inſtruction and admonition, the propereſt uſe we can make of them is to conſider them in that view, and to keep at a diſtance from ſuch nice queſtions as no man enters into with diſcretion, or gets out of with advantage. There is room in all the parts of the Goſpel diſpenſation to admire and adore the wiſdom and the goodneſs of God, if that will content us, without prying into the ſecret methods of his providence. In this caſe now before us we want not matter of this kind: when the tempter allured our firſt parents to diſobedience with the flattering hopes that they ſhould be as gods, little did the

blind prophet think that the day ſhould ever come when the Son of God would appear in the likeneſs of man, to take vengeance of his bold attempt, to deſtroy his works, and to redeem the captives into the glorious liberty even of the ſons of God: little did he imagine that man, who fell by aſpiring to be like God, ſhould ever indeed be ſo like him, as to be ſuperior to all his arts and temptations, and be able to drive him from the dominion he had uſurped over the creation. And yet, behold the wiſdom and the goodneſs of God! By man came death, and by man came the plenteouſneſs of redemption: the firſt fruits of which we ſee in this victory over the tempter.

Thus with reſpect to God does this temptation afford an ample ſubject of praiſe and glory: but, conſidered with reſpect to ourſelves, it will yield us the greateſt comfort and conſolation to ſupport us in our ſpiritual warfare, and the beſt inſtruction how to behave ourſelves in it. There is no doubt to be made but that all the tempter's art was diſplayed againſt our Saviour: here then we may learn the worſt we have to fear, and ſee the dangers we have to paſs, in our way to happineſs, and ſecure ourſelves againſt the ſurpriſes which are often fatal to heedleſs unguarded innocence: here too we may learn from the beſt example how to make the beſt defence againſt the different temptations we ſtand expoſed to; how manfully to maintain the combat, and to reſiſt the fiery darts of the devil.

Theſe leſſons of Chriſtian prudence and fortitude are to be learnt from our Saviour's conduct and behaviour under the different trials the tempter made of him: but I propoſe at this time to conſider

the circumſtances which attended this temptation, and are recorded by the Evangeliſt in my text: *And Jeſus, being full of the Holy Ghoſt, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderneſs, being forty days tempted of the devil.* Now this temptation, we ſee, ſucceeded immediately to his baptiſm, in which the Spirit viſibly deſcended upon him; and God declared him, in a voice from heaven, to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleaſed. And accordingly the text expreſsly tells us, that he was led to be tempted *being full of the Holy Ghoſt.*

You ſee the power of baptiſm, and the bleſſings that are annexed to it, to which all are entitled who partake in the baptiſm of Chriſt: for himſelf he was neither born nor baptized, but for our ſakes; that the bleſſings of both might deſcend on us, who through faith are heirs together with him of the promiſes of God.

By baptiſm the gates of heaven are ſet open to us, and the way paved for our return to our native country: by baptiſm we are declared to be ſuch ſons of God in whom he will delight, and whom he will appoint to be heirs of his kingdom: by baptiſm we receive the promiſe of the Spirit, by which we cry, Abba, Father.

Are not theſe great privileges? And is not here room for mighty expectations? And yet how unſuitable to theſe claims do the circumſtances of a Chriſtian's life often appear! He is upon the road to heaven, you ſay, and the gates ſtand open to receive him; but how does he ſtumble and fall like other men, and ſometimes loſe his way, and wander long, bewildered in night and darkneſs? or, if he keeps

ıe road, how lazily does he travel, as if he were ıwilling to come to his journey's end, and afraid ı ſee the country which he is going to poſſeſs? he Chriſtian only of all men pretends to ſupernaıral power and ſtrength, and an intimate acquaintıce with the Spirit of God: and yet how hardly oes he eſcape the pollutions of the world, and how ften look back with languiſhing eyes upon the leaſures, riches, and honours of this life? And ıough he boaſts of more than human ſtrength, yet ow does he ſometimes ſink below the character ıd dignity even of a man? Ye ſons of God, ır ſuch ye ſay ye are, how do you die like the hildren of men, and how like is your end to ıeirs?

And what muſt we ſay of theſe things? Is the romiſe of God become of none effect? Is baptiſm ınk into mere outward ceremony, and can no ınger reach to the purifying the heart and mind? he fact muſt not be diſputed: it is too evident, at aſt in theſe our days, that the lives of Chriſtians ɔ not anſwer to the manifold gifts and graces beowed on them: and it is as true, that this has ıven great occaſion to the enemies of the Goſpel ı blaſpheme, to ridicule the grace of God, which ems to them to be no real, no uſeful gift or power. ut then it is certain, on the other ſide, that theſe ejudices have ariſen from the miſtaken notions hich men have entertained concerning the grace ' God: their expectations have been groundleſs ıd unwarrantable: they have promiſed themſelves ore than ever God promiſed them; and then, ıding that grace is not what they expected and

hoped it was, they raſhly conclude that it is nothing; and argue againſt the truth of God's promiſes merely from the vanity and deluſion of their own. If you expect that the grace of God ſhould ward off all temptations from you, or reſcue you from the power and influence of them, notwithſtanding your own remiſſneſs and want of care; as well may you expect that ſwords and piſtols ſhould fight your battles, ſubdue your enemies, and conquer countries for you, whilſt your ſoldiers lie diſſolved in eaſe and luxury, and forget to uſe their arms. The graces of the Spirit are the arms of a Chriſtian, with which he is to enter the liſts againſt the powers of darkneſs; and are a certain indication to us that God intends to call us to the proof and exerciſe of our virtue: why elſe does he give us this additional ſtrength? We had ſtrength enough of our own to ſit ſtill and do nothing: had it been his intention to remove us out of the way of temptation, and to place us out of danger, our weakneſs and our ſecurity might well have ſtood together; and having no enemy to fear, we ſhould not have been in need of ſo powerful an ally as the Spirit of God. But ſince our dangers are great, and even neceſſary to the trial of our faith and patient continuance in well-doing, therefore are we ſupported and encouraged by the aſſiſtance of God, *to fight the good fight*, and *to endure hardneſs as good ſoldiers of Jeſus Chriſt*. To this we are called by the example of our Lord and Maſter, who being full of the *Holy Ghoſt* was led by the Spirit *to be tempted*: and this plainly intimates to us, that the more abundant grace we receive, the more reaſon we have to expect trials and tempta-

tions; and *that to whom much is given, of him ſhall much be required.*

And if this be the caſe, as moſt certainly it is, we may, I think, as neceſſary conſequences deduce theſe two things:

Firſt, That the temptations which good men are expoſed to, and often are forced to ſtruggle hard with, are no proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his favour and kindneſs are in any degree leſſened toward them.

Secondly, That the ſins which Chriſtians fall into, and continue in, are no proof that they had not the Spirit, and grace ſufficient to have preſerved their innocence.

Let us conſider theſe two caſes. The temptations which good men are expoſed to, and are forced often to ſtruggle hard with, are no proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his favour and kindneſs are in any degree leſſened toward them. And yet the dread of this is but too common an ingredient in the temptations which good men ſuffer under: it is that which always lies at bottom where there are any ſymptoms of deſpair; and when an honeſt ſoul is haraſſed with doubts and miſgivings of mind, and perſecuted with diſmal thoughts and fears, both of what is preſent, and what is to come, it is from this bitter root, generally ſpeaking, that all the miſery ſprings. Men are apt to imagine, that had they the Spirit of God, the wicked one would either not dare to approach them, or, if he did, that they ſhould ſoon be able to quench his fiery darts, and to command him with authority to get behind their backs. But when the temptation grows upon them, and

though often repulſed, yet as often with redoubled force renews the aſſault, then they begin to ſuſpect themſelves, to fear leſt they are given up to deſtruction, and deſerted by the Spirit of God. And when theſe fears poſſeſs the heart, like ſpies and traitors got within the town, they betray the ſtrength of it to the enemy; they ſtifle all the generous thoughts of vigorous oppoſition, and leave the heart, thus bereaved of courage and conſtancy, and fidelity to itſelf, an eaſy prey to the invader.

The firſt thing then neceſſary in our ſpiritual warfare is rightly to apprehend our own condition, and the dangers and difficulties we are to meet with; that when they come, we may be under no ſurpriſe, but may be able to ſtand firm, and collected both in courage and in counſel, to make our juſt defence. And for this purpoſe did the Author and Captain of our ſalvation leave us his example, that it might ſerve equally for our inſtruction and imitation. And hence we may learn, that our temptations are ſo far from being a proof that we want the Spirit of God, that they are rather a proof of the contrary: *God is faithful, and will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.* And therefore, if he ſuffers our temptations to be great, he will adminiſter ſtrength great in proportion. For the firſt part of our Saviour's life, we read of no temptations that befel him; but no ſooner did he receive the Spirit, but he was led to be tempted. And how did it fare with him? He ſtill conquered, and yet ſtill was purſued. The tempter, though baffled, gave not over, but addreſſed to him with new art and cunning, in hopes ſtill to prevail. Full

y days was he under trial, ſifted in every part, oſed to the horrors of the deſert, to the neceſſity hunger: but neither the neceſſity of hunger, the horrors of darkneſs, nor the forty days ptation, could move him from his ſteadfaſt fidence and truſt in God. And who was it, I ech you, that was left thus expoſed to theſe el trials and temptations? Was it not he whom d but juſt before had by a voice from heaven de- ed *to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well ſed?* And can you ſtill think that your tempta- ns are any ſigns that God has forſaken you, that has at once withdrawn his Spirit and his love n you? Can you think the continuance of your ptations any juſt ground for deſpair, when riſt himſelf was tempted forty days? For forty s without intermiſſion was he tempted: how n the temptation was again renewed, how fre- ent or how long the returns of it were, we cannot : but that the tempter ſtill purſued him, and tched all the ſeaſons and opportunities of ap- aching him with advantage, is plainly intimated the Evangeliſt, in the thirteenth verſe of this apter; *And when the devil had ended all the temp- ion, he departed from him for a ſeaſon.* He de- rted, but, like an enemy that is rather enraged n ſubdued by his overthrow, he departed with olutions to try his fortune again, and in his flight meditated his return. Go, now, and complain, at your life is full of anxious care and trouble, at every day brings its trial with it, and every ght its temptation; and much you fear that God s withdrawn his Holy Spirit from you, and no

longer regards you with the watchful eye of a tender father, but has given you up to uncertain fears, to anguiſh and deſpair in this world, and to ruin inevitable in the next: but when you remember that through all theſe dangers and difficulties Chriſt has led the way, that he, like you, nay more than you, was tempted and expoſed, you muſt bluſh at your complaints, and with confuſion of face confeſs, that you have charged God fooliſhly, and with the holy Pſalmiſt ſay, *It is mine own infirmity.*

Whatever you may think, there is more reaſon to ſuſpect yourſelf, and even to fear concerning the love of God, when all things are calm and ſerene about you, and when you ſtand as it were exempted from the common burden of life, your body free from pain, and your mind from care. One would be apt to ſuſpect that the enemy of mankind thought himſelf ſecure of you, and that there wanted no trials and temptations to urge on your approaching ruin: elſe why ſhould he neglect you only, whilſt with the greateſt diligence and application he is exerciſing with tortures both bodily and ſpiritual all the reſt of the ſons of God? The beſt and the only thing we can ſay to this, is, that proſperity itſelf is the greateſt of temptations, and the ſevereſt trial of virtue and innocence; and that the tempter leaves men to ſink under the charms of plenty and indolence, as the ſureſt method he can make uſe of. And if this be ſo, I am ſure our eaſe and our plenty call upon us for the utmoſt diligence and care, for the conſtant exerciſe of all thoſe virtues that are proper to our ſtation. If we ſee others led to virtue by hardſhips and poverty, let us reflect

that we want thoſe tutors and guides, and that inſtead of them we have only charity and humility to follow: by the exerciſe of theſe we may reap the fruit of the others, and at laſt be found in the number of thoſe who mourned with thoſe who mourned.

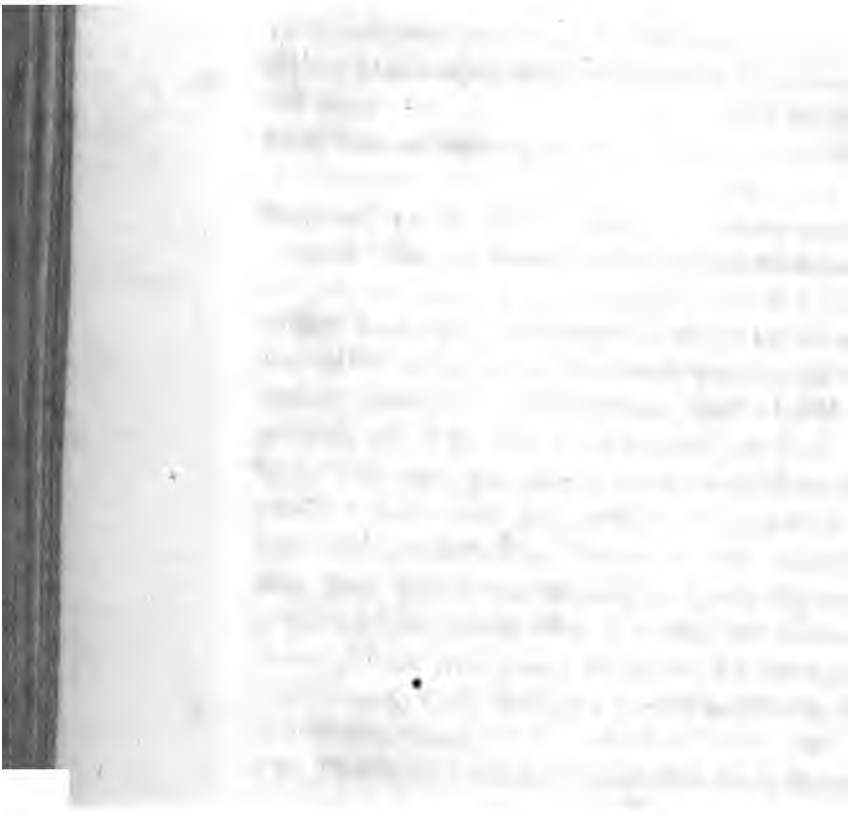
If others ſtruggle with temptations of divers kinds, and are perfected with trials, whilſt we enjoy an inward peace and reſt of ſoul, let us remember that we want the advantages they have. And ſince God has not called us to reſiſt evil, as he has called others, he certainly expects that we ſhould do more good: it is their buſineſs to defend their virtue againſt the aſſaults of vice; but we, who enjoy a free and unmoleſted virtue, muſt improve it in a conſtant exerciſe and diſcharge of all the duties of piety and religion, in keeping a ſtrict hand over our paſſions, that proſperity be not our ruin. If others are forced to ſerve conſtantly upon the guard, and to watch againſt the encroachments of vice, and have work enough to ſecure an unblemiſhed innocence; we, who are placed in the inmoſt and ſecureſt receſſes of the Lord's vineyard, where no dangers can approach to moleſt and diſturb our peace; we, I ſay, ought to labour the more zealouſly to till and improve the ſoil, that we may be able at the laſt to render a good account of the talent committed to our uſe.

Secondly, It appears from the circumſtances of this hiſtory of our Lord's temptation, that trials and temptations may be great and ſevere, where the gifts and graces of the Spirit are adminiſtered in the largeſt proportion: and ſince thoſe who are tempted

may fall, for otherwiſe temptations would be no trials, it appears that thoſe who have the gifts of the Spirit, and grace ſufficient, may nevertheleſs fall into ſin through the power of temptations, and the want of care and diligence on their own part. It is a falſe comfort, therefore, which ſinners adminiſter to themſelves, when they excuſe their ſins by laying all the blame upon their own natural infirmities, and the want of God's grace to enable them to do well. God is never wanting to thoſe who are not wanting to themſelves; and though he ſuffers all to be tempted, yet it is with this reſtriction upon the tempter, that he tempt them not above what they are able to bear. The inſtruction which I propoſe to you from this conſideration is this, that whenever you are ſo unhappy as to offend, you do not try to palliate and excuſe your offences, and charge God fooliſhly as if he had been wanting to your aſſiſtance; but that you rather conſider your own iniquity as your own, and inſtead of excuſing your ſins, and adminiſtering thereby a falſe comfort to your ſoul, you labour through a timely repentance to correct and amend what is amiſs, and endeavour to regain the true peace of mind, by reconciling yourſelves to God, and by a ſpeedy and reſolute return to your duty.

In a word, it is no man's fault that he is tempted; it is the condition of our ſpiritual warfare; it is the combat to which God calls us for the proof and trial of our virtue. Then only are we guilty, when we give way to temptations, and forſake God to follow the pleaſures or the gains of wickedneſs. And whenever this is the caſe, there is but one remedy,

repentance through faith in Chriſt Jeſus, which will never be refuſed when it comes from a ſincere heart, touched with a lively ſenſe of God's goodneſs and its own unworthineſs.



DISCOURSE XXII.

2 Cor. vii. 10.

odly ſorrow worketh repentance to ſalvation not to be re-pented of; but the ſorrow of the world worketh death.

Y. OU have, in the words of the text, a character ven you of religious ſorrow, and the advantages of ſet forth, and illuſtrated by a compariſon be-'een them and the evil effects of worldly ſorrow. ›rrow in all caſes ariſes from the conceit of miſery :her preſent or expected. When our ſorrow grows ›m the conſideration of our ſpiritual condition, ›m a ſenſe of our own iniquity, and the pains of a ıilty mind; from the fear of God's wrath and avy judgments denounced againſt ſinners; which : the proper objects of religious ſorrow, and diſ-ıguiſh it from the grief of a worldly mind, which ıches only to the real or ſuppoſed evils of this : : in this caſe, ſorrow is not only the conſequence the evil we ſuffer or apprehend, but likewiſe its ry cure and remedy. But in worldly grief, where :n lament the loſs of riches and honours, and vex :ir ſouls with the various diſappointments of life; ıich are perpetual ſprings of uneaſineſs to all

whoſe affections are wedded to the pleaſures and enjoyment of the world; there ſorrow is a remedy worſe than the diſeaſe, and adds weight to our miſfortunes, which, could they be neglected, would not be felt.

It is the glory of philoſophy to raiſe men above the misfortunes of life, to teach them to look with indifference upon the pleaſures of the world, and to ſubmit with manly courage and a ſteady mind to thoſe calamities which no care can prevent, and which no concern can cure. Such are all the miſeries which are brought on us by a change of fortune, or the neceſſity of human condition. And the conſiderations of philoſophy not extending beyond theſe limits, it is no wonder to find wiſdom placed in an abſence of paſſion; and grief and ſorrow and all the tender motions of the mind expoſed as certain marks of a ſlaviſh abject ſpirit. But when the reaſons of philoſophy are transferred to the cauſe of religion, they loſe their name; and the ſame concluſions, for want of the ſame principles to ſupport them, are fooliſh and abſurd. In natural evils, ſorrow and grief of mind give us the quickeſt and ſharpeſt ſenſe of our afflictions, and diveſt us of the power of looking out for the proper comforts and ſupports: they increaſe and lengthen out our miſery; nor can the mind ever loſe ſight of its afflictions, till length of time ſets it free from grief, or the very exceſs of ſorrow ſo far ſtupifies the ſenſe of feeling, that it deſtroys itſelf. And when it leaves us, often it carries off with it our ſtrength and health, and bequeaths to us a weak body and a feeble mind, and entails upon the very

beſt days of our youth the very worſt infirmities of age and ſickneſs: *for the ſorrow of the world worketh death.* But in ſpiritual evils, where ſin and guilt threaten the life of the ſoul, and haſten to bring on us death eternal, ſorrow is the beſt indication of life, and, like the pulſe in the natural body, ſhews there is ſome heat and vigour ſtill remaining: as it increaſes, it brings with it the ſymptoms of recovery; ſin and guilt fly before it; life and immortality follow after it. And the mind thus purged by religious ſorrow ſends into the heart freſh ſtreams of pleaſure, and abounds with all the joys which the ſenſe of the love of God, the preſent poſſeſſion of peace, and the firm expectation of future glory can produce: *for godly ſorrow worketh repentance unto ſalvation not to be repented of.* From the conſideration of theſe different effects of worldly and of religious ſorrow, the Apoſtle with no leſs truth than art inſinuates to the Corinthians, how truly he had acted the part of a friend towards them, in bringing them to a due ſenſe of ſorrow for the ſins they had committed. It is the part of a friend to eaſe our minds of grief, to ſtep in between us and ſorrow, and to make us, as far as it is poſſible, forget our misfortunes: why then do the miniſters of Chriſt perpetually ſuggeſt new fears to us, and ſtill labour to awaken our ſouls to a ſenſe of their miſery, and to fill us with ſorrow, by continually repreſenting to us the greatneſs of our loſs? To this let the Apoſtle anſwer for himſelf, and for all: *I rejoice not that ye were made ſorry, but that ye ſorrowed to repentance.* If from worldly ſorrow there can ariſe nothing but certain pain and miſery,

if the anguiſh of mind produces feebleneſs of body, and the lamenting our paſt misfortunes renders us incapable of the enjoyments which are preſent, happy is the man who can bear up againſt afflictions, and with an undiſturbed mind ſubmit to thoſe evils which no ſorrow can either eaſe or prevent. But if in godly ſorrow the effects are juſt contrary, if grief can blot out the guilt of ſins paſt, and preſerve us from the infection for the time to come; if it brings eaſe to a wounded ſpirit, and makes us to be at peace with ourſelves, and with God; if it renders life comfortable, and death not terrible; if it rids us of fear for the preſent, and fills us with hope full of future glory: how happy then are they who go to the houſe of mourning, and by a wiſe choice eſcape the puniſhment of ſin, by ſubmitting to the ſorrow of it?

How theſe bleſſed fruits grow out of godly ſorrow, will appear to you from the Apoſtle's words in the text, in which the effects of godly and worldly ſorrow are fully expreſſed in few words: *Godly ſorrow worketh repentance unto ſalvation not to be repented of*; *but the ſorrow of the world worketh death.* In which words you may obſerve, firſt, that ſorrow is diſtinguiſhed from repentance; for *godly ſorrow* is ſaid to *work repentance*, and is therefore ſuppoſed to have the ſame relation to it that the cauſe has to its effect. Secondly, you may obſerve that *ſorrow* is not ſaid to *work ſalvation* immediately and of itſelf, but by the means of that repentance which it produceth. Thirdly, you may obſerve that *worldly ſorrow* is ſaid to produce *death* immediately: it brings forth nothing analogous to repentance, but

does indeed confirm and ſtrengthen the evil diſpoſition from which it grows. Fourthly, the death which is wrought by worldly ſorrow is oppoſed to the ſalvation which follows repentance; and may therefore ſignify eternal death, as well as temporal; the truth of the propoſition admitting either or both of theſe explications. As I explain and enlarge theſe obſervations, I ſhall take in what I judge neceſſary to give you a diſtinct conception of the nature of godly, and of worldly ſorrow, and to ſhew the effects of both.

Firſt, then, you may obſerve that ſorrow is diſtinguiſhed from repentance; for *godly ſorrow* is ſaid to *work repentance*, and is therefore ſuppoſed to bear the ſame relation to it as the cauſe does to its effect. In common ſpeech we are apt to ſpeak of ſorrow for ſin under the name of repentance, and to aſcribe to it the effects belonging only to repentance: but the Apoſtle in the verſe before us has plainly another notion of repentance, ſince the common notion would make an abſurdity in the text; for if by repentance you underſtand ſorrow for ſin, the Apoſtle muſt then be underſtood to ſay that godly ſorrow produces ſorrow for ſin; that is, that godly ſorrow produces itſelf, ſince that only is godly ſorrow which is upon the account of ſin. Repentance therefore is diſtinct from ſorrow, and is wrought by it, and properly denotes a change of mind: which is indeed the natural effect of godly ſorrow, and the neceſſary condition of ſalvation; and muſt therefore be the true and genuine explication of that repentance which ſtands in the middle between godly ſorrow and ſalvation, as proceeding

from one, and producing the other. And ſo diſtinct is this change of mind from ſorrow, that of all its effects it is the happieſt; eaſe and comfort attend on it, joy and hope flow from it. This is a change *not to be repented of*; it can never cauſe us any grief or pain, or give us reaſon to lament any effect proceeding from it.

Sorrow then is not repentance, though it be the cauſe of repentance in moſt caſes. The alliance between them will be beſt explained by conſidering the nature of ſorrow in general, and the impreſſions it makes upon every man's mind. Whatever is the cauſe of our ſorrow muſt needs be the object of our averſion; ſince to take pleaſure in the thing that grieves us, and cauſes us pain, is a contradiction in nature. Many things occaſion us ſorrow which are out of the reach of our power, which come without our ſeeking, and go without our bidding. In all theſe caſes ſorrow is an uſeleſs paſſion, for the averſion ariſing from it brings torment without ſecurity; for to what purpoſe can our love or our concern ſerve, where the objects are neither to be obtained or avoided by our utmoſt care? Should we afflict ourſelves with the thoughts of death, and raiſe in our minds the utmoſt horror and dread, yet death will move with the ſame pace to us, not retarded by our fears, or ſtopped by our averſion. And this ſhews how ridiculous a paſſion ſorrow is in all theſe caſes.

But where good and evil are ſet before us, and we are left to chooſe for ourſelves, if through weakneſs or folly, or the prevailing power of any paſſion, we have choſen amiſs, the pain we ſuffer from theſe evils

of our own inviting is the beſt ſecurity for the future: we cannot lament the folly of our choice, without condemning ourſelves for making it, and hating the thing which has brought ſo much ſorrow along with it. This ſelf-condemnation will teach us to correct our choice for the future, this averſion will turn the ſtream of our affections from the thing which brings ſo much miſery with it. But this can extend but to very few inſtances of worldly concern, ſo little is there in our own power; for which reaſon worldly ſorrow can only make us feel our misfortunes, without enabling us to redreſs them. But in ſpiritual concerns the caſe is otherwiſe: virtue and vice are placed within our choice; and we cannot do evil till we have firſt determined ourſelves to do it: and, when we have done it, the ſooner our minds recoil and grow ſick of their unhappy choice, ſo much the better; ſince the correction of folly is often the parent of wiſdom, and the miſery we ſuffer through vice the beſt guide to the paths of virtue. Sin cannot be the cauſe of our ſorrow, but it muſt likewiſe be the object of our averſion: the natural conſequence of which is repentance, or a change of mind, by which we ſhall hate the vices we once delighted in, and fly to the arms of virtue, to taſte thoſe pleaſures which experience has taught us are there only to be found. And thus you ſee how naturally a change of mind ariſes from godly ſorrow, or ſorrow for ſin: which is a farther confirmation of the interpretation we have given of the Apoſtle's words.

Secondly, *Godly ſorrow* is not ſaid to *work ſalvation* immediately and of itſelf, but by means of that *repentance*, or change of mind, which it produceth.

This ſhews you, that a change of mind, and conſequently a change of life, is abſolutely neceſſary towards the obtaining the mercy and forgiveneſs of God; and that it is to little purpoſe to lament your ſins, unleſs you reſolve to forſake them. So many are the ſad effects of ſin, with reſpect to our health, our reputation, and our fortune in the world, which always ſuffer, and often ſink, under the oppreſſion of vice, that the ſinner who has no fear of God before his eyes has reaſon enough to be ſorry for his ſins. But ſorrow ariſing from theſe motives is mere worldly ſorrow: one laments the decay of his health, another the loſs of his reputation, and a third the ruin of his fortune, and often one laments the loſs of all: and equally they would have lamented theſe loſſes, had they come from any other cauſe beſides ſin. He that is ſorry for his ſin becauſe it has deſtroyed his health, would have been as ſorry had a fever deſtroyed it; he that grieves for the loſs of his fortune, would have grieved in the ſame manner if fire or the rage of the ſea had been his undoing. From whence it is plain, that in ſuch ſorrow as this no regard is had to God, whom we are principally to reſpect in our repentance, as being the perſon againſt whom we have offended, and whoſe mercy and pardon we labour to obtain.

In true ſorrow that produces repentance, the ſenſe of our guilt is a great ingredient, as well as the ſenſe of our miſery. The very hopes we have of obtaining pardon at the hand of God will fill our minds with indignation againſt ourſelves for having offended ſo gracious a maſter. For if we can think him good to forgive us, we muſt needs think our-

ſelves wicked, and loſt to all ſenſe of gratitude and goodneſs, that we could offend ſo kind and compaſſionate a Lord. From this ſenſe of guilt will ariſe indignation, and fear, and zeal; and every paſſion will be rouſed to act its part in making us hate and abhor ourſelves and our iniquities, and will never let us be at peace with our own hearts, till we have purged them of every evil luſt, and conſecrated them anew to the ſervice of our Maker. And this is that bleſſed change which is true repentance *unto ſalvation never to be repented of.*

Fear may ſometimes prevail againſt the power of luſt, and the wretch who hates to think of God may not be able to exclude the fear and dread of him: when the flames of hell play before the ſinner's eyes, and guilt, conſcious of its own deſerts, fills the imagination with all the horrors of damnation; in this caſe there will never want ſorrow, though perhaps there be no ſigns of repentance. Thus Judas grieved, in his grief he died, and in his death he found the pains of hell.

In the Goſpel there are no promiſes made to grief and ſorrow; the mercies of God are offered upon the condition of repentance: and though in the nature of the thing repentance muſt ariſe from ſorrow, and therefore ſorrow may be eſteemed as a part of repentance; yet ſorrow that produces not repentance, that is, a thorough change and reformation, is of no account in the ſight of God. Such ſorrow may be the ſinner's due; if he ſuffers under it, he has but his reward; it is the juſt puniſhment of his iniquity, but can never be the condition of his pardon.

One would think this were too plain a caſe to be

miſtaken; yet ſo commonly it is miſtaken, that repentance is grown almoſt into a form and method, and, inſtead of reforming their ſins, men ſet themſelves ſo many days to be ſorry for them. Alas! it is a fruitleſs grief they labour to affect themſelves with; and they may aſſure themſelves their hopes of pardon will be as empty and deluſive as their ſorrow. Were you truly ſenſible of your guilt, there would need no art to produce ſorrow, you would want no rules to limit your grief by; nature would be your beſt inſtructor, and teach you to lament your miſery and your guilt with unſought-for tears and groans: were you ſincere, you would fly the viper that had ſtung you, and not cheriſh and careſs the beaſt, whilſt with falſe tears you bathe the wound you have received.

Godly ſorrow is that which reſpects God. This ſorrow will always produce repentance, and be followed by ſalvation, in virtue of the many promiſes of God, by which we are aſſured, that when the ſinner is converted, and turns to the Lord, forſaking the evil of his ways, *he ſhall ſave his ſoul alive.*

Repentance unto life is the gift of God to a ſinful world, and the greateſt that heaven ever beſtowed on it: for though nature is no ſtranger to the grief and ſorrow of repentance, yet is repentance our title to life through the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus. And therefore, when the Gentiles were admitted to be partakers of the Goſpel, and the news thereof was brought to the Apoſtles and brethren at Jeruſalem, they bleſs God for his great goodneſs in having *granted to the Gentiles alſo repentance unto life.*

The nature of this godly ſorrow we ſhall ſtill bet-

er underſtand, by comparing it with worldly ſorow, and ſhewing the difference between them.

Thirdly, then, you may obſerve that *worldly ſorow* is ſaid immediately to *work death:* it brings orth nothing analogous to repentance, but does confirm and ſtrengthen the evil diſpoſition from which it grows.

There is ſuch a connection between the paſſions, that one cannot be powerfully ſet on work, but it muſt move and engage the others in their ſeveral ſpheres. Thus the Apoſtle, in the chapter of my text, tells us that the godly ſorrow of the Corinthians produced fear and indignation, zeal and vehement deſire, and revenge. And thus it muſt be: whatever afflicts us is the object of our hatred and fear; whatever we lament the loſs of, that we muſt needs vehemently deſire and long after; and our grief for the loſs will rouſe us to recover, if poſſible, the thing we lament for. This being agreed, you need only conſider the cauſes from which worldly ſorrow and godly ariſe, to ſee the workings of both, and the different effects which they muſt produce. The covetous man laments for the loſs of his wealth, or regrets that his gains have been no larger: what muſt the conſequence be? This grief will produce no change in him: covetous he was before, his ſorrow for his wealth will make him ſtill more ſo: his induſtry to grow rich will be inflamed by his ſorrow, his concern not to part with what is left will increaſe by his anxiety, and he will be ten times more a ſlave to the world than ever he was before. Conſider the ambitious man's diſappointment, and his ſorrow that flows from it; the caſe will be

ſtill the ſame: how will his vexation urge him to repair his defeat, and make him perhaps diveſt himſelf entirely of all the regards to good and evil, virtue and vice, eſpecially if he has once found them to ſtand in his way? Thus, you ſee, in all caſes worldly ſorrow confirms the evil habits from which it grows, and is therefore the moſt direct way to death.

For the like reaſon godly ſorrow will lead to life; for ſin being the cauſe of ſorrow, all the paſſions will be moved to diſpoſſeſs it: hope and fear, and zeal, and vehement deſire, will unite their force to throw out ſin, which ſtands in the way of all their views. From whence muſt proceed an entire change of the man, and he that is heartily ſorry for his ſins will moſt certainly forſake them.

In godly ſorrow we grieve for having enjoyed too much of the world, to the hazard of loſing the more valuable pleaſures of immortality: in worldly ſorrow we lament our having had too little of the world. It is evident then that ſorrow in one caſe will make us fly the world and its allurements; in the other it will render us but the more eager to purſue and overtake them. In one caſe, ſorrow does as it were new make the man, gives him new deſires and diſpoſitions of mind, teaches him to ſhun the pleaſures he once embraced with eager appetite, and to ſeek new joys and comforts which before he was a ſtranger to. In the other caſe, grief confirms the old habits, quickens the old deſires, and makes a man ten times more worldly-minded than he was before; ſo that his laſt ſtate is even worſe than his firſt. And this will appear by conſidering, in the laſt place,

Fourthly, That the death which is wrought by worldly ſorrow is oppoſed to the ſalvation which follows repentance, and may therefore ſignify eternal death as well as temporal, the truth of the propoſition admitting either or both of theſe explications.

The natural effect of grief, conſidered as ſuch, is to waſte and impair the ſtrength, to deaden the faculties of the mind, and to make a man uſeleſs to himſelf and his friends: ſo that where this paſſion inflamed to any degree has been long in poſſeſſion, it leaves nothing of the man, but the outward form, and hardly that. This, I ſay, is the effect of ſorrow in general: but then here lies the difference between godly ſorrow and worldly ſorrow: the firſt, in every ſtep, tends to peace and joy, and its moſt natural effect is to deſtroy itſelf, and leave the mind in perfect eaſe and tranquillity. The ſinner's tears, though they ſpring from grief, are yet the moſt ſovereign cordial to an afflicted heart, and like ſhowers in ſummer portend a cooler and more refreſhing air. But worldly ſorrow knows no reſt, it has no period; it ſtill urges men to new purſuits after the world, and the world has new diſappointments in reſerve to baffle all their eager care. Every diſappointment is a new occaſion of grief; and the whole gain of this paſſion for the world, being fairly computed, amounts to this, *Vanity and vexation of ſpirit.* Thus the caſe ſtands if we regard only the comforts of this life. The ſorrow for ſin produces the pleaſure of righteouſneſs, which is a perpetual ſpring of joy and ſpiritual conſolation: whilſt the worldly man, purſuing falſe enjoyments, is ever reaping real tor-

ments. But if we change the ſcene, and look into the other world, the difference grows wider ſtill: the time is coming when the tears of repentance ſhall be wiped away, when the ſinner's grief ſhall ſtand between him and judgment, and the ſhame which he took to himſelf ſhall protect him from ſhame at the great appearance of the world. But worldly ſorrow will then have an heavy account to paſs; thoſe guilty tears, which were ſhed for tranſitory pleaſures of mortality, will ſtand in judgment againſt you, and exclude you from the joys of that life which is for evermore.

The confuſion and diſtreſs of that time will be more than I can deſcribe, or you imagine; they will exceed even the fears of guilt, and be more gloomy than even deſpair could ever paint them. The whole is compriſed in the words of the text, *The ſorrow of the world worketh death.*

DISCOURSE XXIII.

PART I.

1 PETER ii. 11.

Dearly beloved, I beſeech you as ſtrangers and pilgrims, abſtain from fleſhly luſts, which war againſt the ſoul.

THE exhortations of Scripture to abſtain from fleſhly luſts, or luſts of the fleſh, are ſo many, the expreſſion itſelf is ſo familiar to Chriſtians, and ſo well underſtood, that there is no need, I think, of many words to explain the ſubject matter of the advice now before us. Some ſins are privileged by their impurity from being expoſed as they deſerve: a modeſt tongue cannot relate, nor a modeſt ear receive an account, without great pain, of the various kinds of lewdneſs practiſed in the world: for as the Apoſtle to the Epheſians remarks, *It is a ſhame even to ſpeak of thoſe things which are done of them in ſecret.* Had he lived in our times, he might perhaps have varied his phraſe, and ſaid, *which are done of them in public.* Theſe impurities are, in one ſenſe of the word, no longer *works of darkneſs*, they appear at noon-day. Since therefore they no longer affect to be diſguiſed, they will

ſpeak for themſelves what they are: I have no mind to ſpeak for them.

The Apoſtle in the text has pointed out to us the common ſource from whence vices of this kind proceed; they ariſe from *fleſhly luſts:* words which carry a reaſon in them, to all who value their reaſon, not to give themſelves up to the dominion of appetites, made not to govern, but to ſerve the man. But reaſon, when it becomes a ſlave to vice, muſt do the drudgery of vice, and ſupport its cauſe: and therefore, upon this topic, vice has borrowed ſome aſſiſtance from reaſon, and made a ſhew of arguing in its own defence. Theſe *fleſhly luſts*, as the Scripture calls them, others are willing to call natural deſires: and then the queſtion is aſked, How it becomes ſo heinous an offence to comply with the deſires which God, for wiſe reaſons, has made to be part of the nature which he has given us? Were this queſtion aſked in behalf of the brute creatures, we would readily anſwer, We accuſe them not: but when man aſks it in his own behalf, he forgets that he has another queſtion to anſwer before he can be entitled to aſk this, For what purpoſe was reaſon and underſtanding given to man? Brutes have no higher rule to act by than theſe inſtincts and natural impreſſions; and therefore, in acting according to theſe, they act up to the dignity of the nature beſtowed on them, and are blameleſs. But can you ſay the ſame of man? Does he act up to the dignity of his nature, when he makes that his rule which is common to him and the beaſts; when he purſues the ſame inclinations, and with as little regard to virtue and morality? Why is man diſtin-

guiſhed from the brute creatures by ſo ſuperior a degree of reaſon and underſtanding, by a knowledge of moral good and evil, by a notion of God his creator and governor, by a certain expectation of judgment, ariſing from a ſenſe of his being accountable, if after all there is but one rule of acting for him and for the beaſts that periſh? Let theſe deſires be natural; yet tell me, Does the addition of reaſon make no difference? Is a creature endowed with knowledge at liberty to indulge his deſires with the ſame freedom, as a creature that has no reaſon to reſtrain it? If this be abſurd, it is to little purpoſe to plead that the deſires are natural, ſince we have reaſon given us to direct them, and are not at liberty to do whatever appetite prompts us to do, but muſt in all things conſider what is reaſonable and fit for us to do: for ſurely there is no caſe in which a reaſonable creature may renounce the direction of reaſon.

It will be farther urged, To what purpoſe were theſe deſires given, which are apparently the cauſe of much miſchief and iniquity in the world, and oftentimes a great diſturbance to the beſt in a life of religion? In reply to this, it will be neceſſary to conſider how far theſe deſires are natural.

If we look into mankind, we ſhall find that the deſires which are common, and therefore may be called natural, are ſuch as are neceſſary to the preſervation of individuals, and ſuch as are neceſſary for the preſervation of the ſpecies. At the ſame time that we find theſe natural deſires, we diſcover the ends which nature has to ſerve by them; and reaſon from thence diſcerns the true rule for the

government and direction of them. Our bodies are ſo made, that they cannot be ſupported without conſtant nouriſhment: hunger and thirſt therefore are natural appetites given us to be conſtant calls to us to adminiſter to the body the neceſſary ſupports of the animal life. Aſk any man of common ſenſe now, how far theſe appetites ought to be indulged; he cannot help ſeeing that nature calls for no more than is proper for the health and preſervation of the body, and that reaſon preſcribes the ſame bounds; and that when theſe appetites are made occaſions of intemperance, an offence is committed againſt as well the order of nature, as the rule of reaſon. The exceſs therefore of theſe appetites is not natural but vicious: the intemperate man is not called upon by his natural appetites, but he does, in truth, call upon them to aſſiſt his ſenſuality, and often loads them ſo hard that they recoil, and nauſeate what is obtruded upon them. An habitual drunkard may have, and has, I ſuppoſe, an uncommon craving upon him; but the exceſs of his craving is not natural: it is not of God's making, but of his own, the effect of a long practiſed intemperance: and ſuch an appetite will be ſo far from being an excuſe, that it is itſelf a crime.

In other inſtances of a like nature, they who have inflamed deſires, commonly owe the exceſs of them to their own miſconduct. There is a great deal of difference between men of the ſame temper, where one ſhuns, and where the other ſeeks the temptation; where one employs his wit to miniſter to his appetite, and the other uſes his reaſon to ſubdue it: the paſſions of one, by being uſed to ſubjection, are

aught to obey; the appetites of the other, knowing no reſtraint, take fire upon every occaſion; and the corrupted mind, inſtead of oppoſing, endeavours to heighten as well the temptation as the ſin: and often it is ſeen, that the reliſh for the ſin outlaſts the temptation: a plain evidence that there is a greater corruption in ſenſual men than can be charged upon natural inclination.

Since therefore the deſires of nature are in themſelves innocent, and ordained to ſerve good ends; ſince God has given us reaſon and underſtanding to moderate and direct our paſſions; it is in vain to plead our paſſion in defence or excuſe of ſenſuality, unleſs at the ſame time we could plead that we were void of reaſon, and had no higher principle than paſſion to influence our actions: for if it be the work of reaſon to keep the paſſions within their proper bounds, the reaſonable creature muſt be accountable for the work of his paſſion. And ſo the caſe is in human judicatures: anger and revenge, pride and ambition, are very headſtrong paſſions, and the cauſe of great miſchief in the world; but they cannot be alleged in excuſe of the iniquity they produce, becauſe the reaſon of the offender makes him liable to anſwer for the extravagance of his paſſion. Take away reaſon, and bring a madman or an ideot into judgment, and the magiſtrate has nothing to ſay to him, whatever his paſſions, or the effects of them, may be.

It is the work of reaſon then to preſide over the paſſions: and ſeeing it is ſo, let us conſider what great motives we have to guard againſt the irregularities of them. St. Peter is very earneſt in the

exhortation of the text, *Dearly beloved, I beſeech you as ſtrangers and pilgrims, abſtain from fleſhly luſts, which war againſt the ſoul.* Here are two things offered to our conſideration as motives:

Firſt, That we are *ſtrangers and pilgrims*, and ought therefore to abſtain from fleſhly luſts.

Secondly, That *fleſhly luſts war againſt the ſoul*, and therefore we ought to abſtain from them. I ſhall conſider them in their order.

Firſt, We are *ſtrangers and pilgrims*, and ought therefore to abſtain from fleſhly luſts.

St. Peter directs this Epiſtle to the *ſtrangers ſcattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Aſia, and Bithynia*; which has led ſome to think that he applies to them in the text under the ſame notion, and calls them *ſtrangers and pilgrims* upon account of their diſperſion upon the earth. But I ſee no force in the exhortation upon this view. With reſpect to religion and morality, there is no more reaſon to abſtain from vice in a foreign country than in your own. There may poſſibly be ſometimes prudential reaſons for ſo doing: but this is too narrow, and too mean a conſideration, for an Apoſtle of Chriſt to build ſo weighty an exhortation on it, as that of the text. We muſt look out therefore for a more proper meaning of theſe words, and more ſuitable to the occaſion. And we need not look far for it: in the firſt chapter of this Epiſtle, verſe 17, St. Peter thus exhorts, *If you call on the Father, who without reſpect of perſons judgeth according to every man's work, paſs the time of your ſojourning here with fear.* It is plain that St. Peter here calls the time of life the time of our ſojourning here; and conſequently

reckons us to be ſtrangers and pilgrims as long as we are in this world. In the ſame ſenſe the author to the Hebrews ſpeaks of the ſaints of old, *Theſe all died in faith, not having received the promiſes, but having ſeen them afar off, and were perſuaded of them, and embraced them, and confeſſed that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth*, Heb. xi. 13. This notion extends to all mankind, and ſhews that the Apoſtle looked upon them all as ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth: conſequently the exhortation founded upon this notion extends to all alike, and reaches as far as the obligations of morality reach. And this conſideration, placed in this view, has great weight in it, with reſpect to all who have faith enough to *deſire a better, that is, an heavenly country*, and to know themſelves to be but only paſſengers through this world, and on their way to *a city prepared for them*. This is putting all our hopes and fears, with reſpect to futurity, in balance againſt the ſolicitations of ſenſual pleaſure: this is appealing to our reaſon, to ſhew us how abſurd it is to give ourſelves up to momentary enjoyments, in a place where we have no certain abode, at the hazard of forfeiting our right to that country where we have an inheritance which ſhall endure for ever. Wiſe travellers do not uſe ſo to entangle themſelves in the affairs of foreign countries, as to cut off all hopes of a return to their own home: ſuch eſpecially as belong to a country in no reſpect to be rivalled by any other place, and are entitled to a large ſhare of the wealth and honour of it; ſuch, I ſay, will not ſuffer their thoughts and cares to be ſo engaged abroad as to forget their own inheritance, which waits to be enjoyed, and which, once enjoyed,

will recompenſe all the fatigues and hazards of the journey. But this compariſon conveys to our minds but a faint image of the caſe before us: one country may differ from another, but no one differs ſo much from another as to repreſent to us the difference between heaven and earth. Many are entitled to great degrees of honour and riches in their own countries; but no man is entitled to ſo much on earth as every man is entitled to in heaven, if he forfeits not his hopes by ſacrificing them to the mean and low enjoyments of the world. Put the caſe, that a man was ſo framed by nature as to hold out a thouſand years in his native air, and to be hourly in danger of death in foreign parts, and at beſt able to hold out but to ſixty or eighty years at moſt: how eagerly would ſuch a man preſs homewards, if ever he found himſelf in another country! How would he deſpiſe the ſtrongeſt temptations of pleaſure that ſhould pretend to ſtay him but a day! How contemptible would all the honours and glories and riches of foreign kingdoms appear to him, when put in the balance againſt the ſecure and long life to be enjoyed at home! Add to this ſuppoſition one circumſtance more, that the man is by nature made for the enjoyments which his own country only can afford, that all the pleaſures elſewhere to be found are attended with pain and uneaſineſs in the purſuit, liable to many vexations and diſappointments; the enjoyment of them turbulent and tranſient, the remembrance of them irkſome and oftentimes tormenting: in this caſe what would a wiſe man do? Would he not reject with diſdain ſuch enjoyments as theſe, and call up all the ſtrength of his mind, ſummon all the powers of reaſon to

withſtand temptations ſo deſtructive to his natural and real happineſs?

But what need to dwell on ſuppoſitions, when the truth of our caſe, fairly repreſented, will appear in a ſtronger light than any ſuppoſition can place it?

If we have immortal ſouls, and that we have nature ſpeaks within us, this place, we are ſure, is not their native country: nothing immortal can belong to this globe, where all things tend to decay; which ſhall itſelf be one day conſumed, and this beautiful order be ſucceeded by a new confuſion and another chaos. Were this the only place to which we have relation, we might juſtly complain of nature for the ſad proviſion ſhe has made for man: he only, of all the creatures of this lower world, wants an happineſs ſuited to his capacity. The reſt of the creatures ſeem ſatisfied and happy, to the full meaſure of their capacities, by the proviſion made for them. Man alone finds no true enjoyment here, but is ever reſtleſs, and in purſuit of ſomething more than this world can give. If ſomething more is in reſerve for him, his deſires are well ſuited to his condition, and the wiſdom of God is diſcernible in giving man deſires fitted for nobler enjoyments than this life affords, ſince for man much nobler enjoyments are prepared. Theſe deſires are given to be a conſtant call to him to remember the dignity of his creation, and to look forward to the better hopes of a better world; and to govern and reſtrain the appetites which, too freely indulged, ſet him upon a level with the brutes, and diſqualify him for the happineſs proper to rational beings.

Taking this to be the caſe, what is it a wiſe man has to do, but to get as well through this world as he can; I had almoſt ſaid as faſt as he can, that he may arrive at thoſe enjoyments in reſerve for him, which will yield a full as well as an endleſs ſatisfaction? What can he think of the pleaſures of this world, but that they are below the care of him who is born to ſo great expectations? Thus he muſt think even of innocent delights: they are frail, tranſitory, and uncertain; he is immortal: theſe therefore are but unworthy objects of his deſires; fit to be uſed, but too mean to be courted; proper for his diverſion, but never good enough to become his buſineſs, or to employ his thoughts in the purſuit of them. But guilty pleaſures, the ſenſual enjoyments and pollutions of the world, appear to him in a more ugly form: he is upon the way, haſtening to the place where his heart is fixed: ſenſual pleaſures are robbers which frequent his road, and lie in wait to take away his life and his treaſure: theſe he will fly, for they are dangerous, and he has all his wealth about him; even his hopes and expectations of immortality, which die away if once he falls into the ſnares of ſenſuality.

Conſider this caſe fairly, look to the glory and immortality which are placed before you, and the everlaſting habitation prepared for thoſe who ſerve their Maker in holineſs, and keep themſelves unſpotted from the world: then view the temptations which ſurround you, which would fix you down to this world, and intercept all your hopes; and tell me what more powerful argument there can be to abſtain from fleſhly luſts than this, that ye are

rangers and pilgrims on earth, and look for an-
:her, even an heavenly habitation.

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, ſay
ıe diſciples of Epicurus: commendable in this,
ıat their exhortation is ſuitable to their principle.
'here is no inconſiſtency in exhorting men to
ıake the beſt of this world and the pleaſures of it,
hen you teach them there is no other to be ex-
ected: but ſurely it is to the higheſt degree ab-
ırd to teach the ſame doctrine, without aſſerting
ıe ſame principle. There is not common ſenſe in
ying, Let us eat and drink, for after this life we
ıall enter upon another without end. Yet this is
ıe wiſe exhortation which every man makes, who
retends to believe a future ſtate, and yet pleads for
liberty to indulge his appetites in this. Yes, ſay
ou: but God, who knows what he has prepared
ır us hereafter, has yet given theſe appetites: and
ow can it be ſo inconſiſtent with our future ex-
ectations to gratify our appetites at preſent, ſince
ur appetites as well as our expectations are natural,
nd both derived from the ſame original? This is
ıe capitol of the cauſe, the darling argument of
ıe ſenſual man. But ſuppoſe this world to be a
:ate of trial, ſuppoſe theſe appetites to be given
artly for the proof of our virtue, how will the con-
ıquence ſtand then? God has given us appetites
ır the trial of our virtue, therefore we may indulge
ur appetites without any regard to virtue: how?
Jo man ſurely can reaſon thus: it can never follow
ıat we are at liberty to ſin, becauſe God has
ıought fit to call us to a trial of our virtue. But if
ſod has given us appetites, and made it part of our

trial to govern and reſtrain them within the bounds of temperance and juſtice, and you will nevertheleſs infer, that becauſe God has given theſe appetites, we may therefore indulge them to the utmoſt; what is it but making that a licenſe to ſin, which God and nature intended for a trial of virtue?

But you will inſiſt farther perhaps, and aſk, How it is conſiſtent with God's goodneſs to work ſuch temptations as theſe into the very nature of mankind? A notable queſtion! But if you attend to it, it comes to this: How is it conſiſtent with God's goodneſs to make any thing that is not abſolutely perfect, to make rational creatures, for inſtance, capable of doing amiſs? The queſtion, I ſay, comes to this, or elſe there is nothing in it: for if God may make creatures not abſolutely perfect, but capable of ſinning, there is no greater objection againſt putting the trial of their virtue upon their natural appetites, than upon any other weakneſs or infirmity: and ſome infirmity there muſt be in every creature capable of offending, and thereby capable of a trial. Had we no deſires that could incline us to do amiſs, we ſhould be above a ſtate of trial: and if it is lawful to indulge all our deſires upon this pretence, that they are natural, it is evident we cannot do amiſs in following our deſires, and conſequently we are not in a ſtate of trial. What hitherto we have called temptations to ſin, are in truth juſtifications of it; for temptations act upon our deſires, and our deſires cannot lead us wrong: and if ſo, every baſe action is juſtified by the temptation that produces it: and no man can ſin but when he is forced to do ſomething againſt

is inclination. This plea, drawn from natural desires, is, I know, made use of to justify one kind of wickedness particularly: but surely this is very partial dealing; for I see no reason why pride, ambition, and avarice should be excluded the benefit of it. Have pride, ambition, and avarice no desires; or are they all unnatural? It would be well for the world if they were, but the case is otherwise: mankind are of a nature subject to these desires as well as others; and upon the foot of this plea we may make saints, as well as heroes, of all the great disturbers of the world.

To conclude: the desires of nature are ordained to serve the ends of nature: reason is given to man to govern the lower appetites, and to keep them within their proper bounds: in this consists the virtue of man: this is the trial to which he is called; and the prize contended for is nothing less than immortality. If we indulge ourselves to the utmost in this world, our enjoyments must be very short-lived, since we are ourselves but of a short continuance on earth; but the next scene that opens will present us with a state that never changes, either happy or miserable, according as we behave here. In this world we have little interest, no abiding place; and ought therefore to pass through it with the indifference of travellers, whose affections are placed on their native country. This is the view the Apostle had before him in giving the exhortation contained in the text, *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.*

DISCOURSE XXIII.

PART II.

THE Apoſtle in the text enforces his exhortation *to abſtain from fleſhly luſts* by two conſiderations, which yet are near allied to each other. He calls upon us to remember that we are ſtrangers and pilgrims here on earth, and conſequently that we have a better and a dearer intereſt in another country, which ought by no means to be neglected for the ſake of the low and mean enjoyments which this world affords. Whoever allows the principle muſt needs allow the conſequence. If we are related to two worlds, if this preſent be in all reſpects inconſiderable, compared to the other, no reaſon can juſtify or excuſe us in ſacrificing our intereſt in the other world to the allurements and temptations to be met with in this.

This being allowed leads us to an inquiry worthy of all the pains we can beſtow on it, how far we may purſue the pleaſures of this life, conſiſtently with our hopes and expectations of a better. Some enjoyments there are not below the care of a wiſe and good man in this world, though he forgets not

that he is related to another: ſuch are the pleaſures of the mind, ariſing from the exerciſe of reaſon: ſuch are, in a lower degree, the pleaſures which our ſenſes furniſh, whilſt uſed within the bounds of temperance, and ſo reſtrained as not to be prejudicial to ourſelves and others. Whenever our appetites become ſo much too ſtrong for our reaſon, as to carry us into offences in either of theſe reſpects, then it is that our *fleſhly luſts do war againſt the ſoul.* If we violate the laws of juſtice and equity, to make way for the gratification of our paſſions; or if we render ourſelves incapable of diſcharging the duties of religion and morality, ariſing from the relation we bear to God and man, we wound our own ſouls, and, for the ſake of momentary pleaſures, expoſe ourſelves to death eternal.

It ought to be a ſufficient argument to Chriſtians, to ſhew them the expreſs command of the Goſpel againſt drunkenneſs, fornication, adultery, and vices of the like nature: for ſince the command comes from him who has power to execute his decrees, and the penalty of them, upon every offender; to tranſgreſs ſuch injunctions ſo given muſt diſcover a want of faith, as well as a want of virtue. But the Apoſtle in the text goes farther, and exhorts us to *abſtain from fleſhly luſts,* by laying before us the reaſon in which the command to abſtain is founded: was there no difference between abſtaining and not abſtaining; was the man who gives a looſe to his paſſions, and indulges them to the utmoſt, in as fair a way to happineſs as he who governs and reſtrains them, and bounds them on every ſide by the rules of juſtice and equity; the

command to abſtain would be merely arbitrary, and void of any reaſon to ſupport itſelf. But the caſe is not ſo: ſenſual enjoyments have a natural tendency to debaſe the mind, to render it incapable of diſcharging its proper functions, and unworthy of the happineſs to which it is ordained; for *fleſhly luſts war againſt the ſoul:* for which reaſon we are commanded to abſtain from them: for which reaſon we ought to abſtain from them, though the command had not intervened.

If you conſider wherein the dignity of man conſiſts, and what are the means put into his hands to make himſelf happy, you will have a clear proſpect of the ill effects of ſenſual luſts, and ſee how truly they war againſt the ſoul.

There is no occaſion to carry you into any abſtracted ſpeculations upon this ſubject; it will be ſufficient to the purpoſe to make uſe of the obſervations which common ſenſe will furniſh.

There is no man ſo little acquainted with himſelf, but that he ſometimes finds a difference between the dictates of his reaſon, and the cravings of appetite; between the things which he would do, and the things which he knows he ought to do. This diſcord is the foundation of the difference to be obſerved among men with regard to their moral character and behaviour. When men give themſelves up to follow their appetites, and have no higher aim than the gratification of their paſſions, all the uſe they have of their reaſon is to adminiſter to their ſenſes in contriving ways and means to ſatisfy them. Where this is the caſe, conſider what a figure a man makes: he has appetites in common

with the brute creatures, and is led by them as much as they; only the reaſon he has enables him to be more brutiſh than they, and to run into greater exceſſes of ſenſuality, than mere natural appetites, without the help and aſſiſtance of reaſon to contrive for them, can arrive to.

If our paſſions are to govern us, and the office of reaſon is only to be ſubſervient, and to furniſh means and opportunities of gratifying the deſires, it will be very hard to account for the wiſdom of God in making ſuch a creature as man. If we have no higher purpoſes to ſerve than the brute creatures, why have we more underſtanding than they? We ſee that they do not want more reaſon than they have to follow their appetites; they move regularly as they are moved, and purſue conſtantly the path marked out by nature. It would be well if we could ſay as much for ſome ſenſual men; but they are ten times more miſchievous to the world, than they could poſſibly be, if they had only appetites, and no reaſon: for appetites, unaſſiſted by a power of contriving, could be guilty of no treachery, no breach of truſt; of no ſchemes to overreach, defraud, and undo multitudes, and a thouſand other wickedneſſes, which ſenſual worldly men are daily guilty of, and will be guilty of, as long as their reaſon is employed to promote the ends of their paſſion. So that, conſidering the caſe with reſpect to this world only, the ſenſual man, who gives himſelf to be conducted by his appetites, is a more miſchievous, a more odious creature, and a greater reproach to his Maker, than any of the brutes; which

he may perhaps deſpiſe, but ought indeed to envy, for being irrational.

From hence it is evident in what manner ſenſual luſts do war againſt the ſoul, conſidered as the ſeat of reaſon, and all the nobler faculties; in the due uſe and improvement of which the dignity of man conſiſts. If we look into the ages paſt, or into the preſent, we ſhall want no inſtances of the pernicious effects of paſſion, aſſiſted by a corrupt and depraved reaſon. The miſeries which men bring upon themſelves and others are derived from this fountain; and theſe miſeries, which we provide for ourſelves and others, will be found, upon a fair computation, to make nine parts out of ten of all the evil which the world feels and complains of. *From whence come wars and fightings among you?* ſays St. James, *come they not hence, even of your luſts, which war in your members?* He might have added to his catalogue many iniquities more, and repeated the ſame queſtion and anſwer: for, Whence proceed jealouſies, ſuſpicions, the violations of friendſhip, the diſcord and ruin of private families? Whence comes murder, violence, and oppreſſion? Are theſe the works of reaſon given us by God? No, they are the works of ſenſuality, and of a reaſon made the ſlave of ſenſuality. Were all who are given to ſuch works as theſe to be deprived of their reaſon, the world about them would be much happier, themſelves more harmleſs, and, I think too, not leſs honourable. So effectually do ſenſual luſts war againſt the ſoul, that it would be better for the world, and not worſe for the ſenſualiſt, if he had no ſoul at all.

But to be more particular. Let us conſider that the only part of man, capable of any improvement, is the ſoul: it is little or nothing we can do for the body; and if we could do more, it would be little worth. We cannot add to our ſtature; and if we could, where would be the advantage? The affections, which have their ſeat in the body, can yield us no honour: they are capable of no improvement; the higher they riſe, the more deſpicable we grow: they can yield us neither profit nor credit, but only when we conquer and ſubdue them. If therefore we have any ambition of being better than we are in any reſpect, either in this world or in the next, we muſt cultivate the mind, the only part of us capable of any improvement.

The excellency of a rational creature conſiſts in knowledge and virtue, one the foundation of the other: theſe are the things we ought to labour after: but ſenſual luſts are great impediments to our improvement in either of theſe, and do therefore properly war againſt the ſoul.

As to knowledge, the beſt and moſt uſeful part of it is the knowledge of ourſelves, and of the relation we ſtand in to God and our fellow-creatures, and of the duties and obligations ariſing from theſe conſiderations. Now this knowledge is ſuch an enemy to ſenſual luſts, that a ſenſual man will be very much indiſpoſed to receive it. It is ſelf-condemnation to him to admit the principles of this knowledge; and therefore his reaſon, as long as it continues in the ſervice of his paſſion, will be employed to diſcredit ſuch knowledge as this, and if poſſible to ſubvert and overthrow the principles upon which

it ſtands. Hence proceed the many prejudices to be met with in the world againſt the firſt principles of natural religion; the many laboured arguments to deſtroy the very diſtinction of ſoul and body, and all hopes of a future exiſtence: ſuch hard maſters are the luſts of the fleſh! They compel the ſoul to deny itſelf, to reſign all its pretenſions to preſent or future happineſs, in condeſcenſion to the paſſions and appetites of the body. Take out of the compoſition of a man the inclinations to ſenſual pleaſures, and he muſt needs rejoice to hear of another life in which he may be for ever happy. If he ſees not ſo much reaſon as to be ſure of living for ever, yet he will be willing to hope he may, and his mind will be always open to receive whatever may ſtrengthen and ſupport ſuch hopes. But the ſenſual man ſees nothing that ſuch a future ſtate can afford him but miſery and deſtruction; therefore he ſhuts his eyes againſt the light, and places a guard over his mind, to ſecure it from ſuch unwelcome thoughts. He hopes, he believes, at laſt he comes to demonſtrate, that ſouls, and ſpirits, and future ſtates, are mere idle dreams, the inventions either of fools or of politicians.

If the fear of God be in truth, as in truth it is, the beginning of wiſdom, ſenſuality cuts us off from all hopes of improvement, conſidered as rational beings, by choaking the ſpring from whence all wiſdom flows. It ties us down to the world, it materializes the ſoul, and makes it incapable of any noble thoughts or conceptions worthy itſelf. And thus men, by following the ſenſual enjoyments of the world, become carnal in their minds, as well as in

their bodies; and inſtead of a reaſon qualifying them to be ſervants of God, the higheſt honour of which a rational being is capable, they get a low cunning to ſerve themſelves and the worſt of their own deſires, which differs but little from the ſtrong inſtincts to be found in creatures of a lower order; but little, I mean, in point of excellency, though in another reſpect it differs much. The creatures anſwer the ends of their nature, and are guiltleſs in purſuing their ſeveral inſtincts: but the ſenſual man is uſeleſs to himſelf, injurious to the world, and, as far as in him lies, brings a reproach upon the hand that made him. For,

Secondly, Virtue and morality are the diſtinguiſhing characters of rational beings; but theſe will always be loſt where the appetites have dominion.

In all caſes where our thoughts are confined to ourſelves, and we aim at no other end than our own intereſt or pleaſure, we act upon a principle deſtructive of morality. The ability we have of extending our views beyond ourſelves, and conſidering what is fit and proper and reaſonable with regard to others, is the foundation of morality. It is not perhaps a total want of reaſon that renders brutes incapable of morality; but whatever reaſon they have, it is confined to themſelves, and exerciſed only with regard to their own wants and deſires, and this renders them immoral agents. Now every degree of ſenſuality is an approach to this ſtate: the ſenſual man labours in the gratification of his own paſſions, and has no other end than to ſerve himſelf, nay the worſt part of himſelf, in all his actions. This makes him overlook what is due to others, and to

caſt behind him all regards to juſtice, equity, and compaſſion, in the eagerneſs of obtaining the object of his deſires. Hence it is that the covetous man is apt to defraud all he deals with, to betray the truſt committed to him, and to make a prey of the widow and the orphan unhappily placed under his protection. Hence it is that the ambitious man lays all waſte about him, and fills the world with blood, violence, and rapine; ſacrificing his country, friends, and relations to his inordinate deſire of power. Hence it is, that the luſtful man breaks the bonds of friendſhip and hoſpitality, and entails diſhonour and reproach upon the man who loves him beſt; hence it is that he lies in wait to betray unguarded innocence, and is content, for the ſake of his paſſion, to bring ſhame, reproach, remorſe of conſcience, and all the evils of life, upon a fellow-creature. It is the eſſence of morality to bound the deſires within the limits of reaſon, juſtice, and equity. It is not having or exerciſing great power that makes an ambitious man; a king may be as virtuous as any of his ſubjects; but it is getting and uſing it unjuſtly. It is not much wealth that denominates a man covetous, but it is the method of obtaining and diſpenſing riches that makes the difference. And for the other caſe mentioned, you ſhall have the reſolution of it in the words of an Apoſtle, *Marriage is honourable in all men, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*

It is plain from theſe inſtances, that the virtue of a man conſiſts in bounding his deſires, and reſtraining them within the limits preſcribed by reaſon and morality: theſe limits the luſts of the fleſh are per-

petually tranſgreſſing; every ſuch tranſgreſſion is a wound to the ſoul, which weakens its natural faculties, and renders it leſs able to diſcharge its proper office: for reaſon will not always ſtrive with a man; but if often ſubdued by corrupt affections, it will at laſt give over the conteſt, and grow hard, ſtupid, and void of feeling.

And this ſuggeſts another conſideration, to ſhew how effectually ſenſual luſts do war againſt the ſoul, by extinguiſhing the force of natural conſcience, and not leaving a man reaſon and religion enough to repent of his iniquities. The mind grows ſenſual by degrees, and loſes all reliſh for ſerious thought and contemplation; it contracts an hardneſs by long acquaintance with ſin, and is armed with a brutal courage which regards neither God nor man. Age and infirmities may free us from our ſenſual paſſions, the ſinner may outlive his ſins; but what is he the better, ſince his ſins perhaps outlived his conſcience, and left him without either will or power to turn to God? This is no uncommon caſe: and whenever it is the caſe, the circumſtances which ſurround a man conſpire to make it deſperate. His mind, by being long immerſed in ſenſuality, is unapt for ſerious reflection, and indiſpoſed to receive the truths which reaſon offers: and beſides this, the little glimmering lights of religion, which ſhine but faintly in his mind, yield no comfort or conſolation to him, and he dreads the breaking in of more light upon him, leſt, by knowing more, he ſhould become more miſerable: this makes him love the darkneſs in which he is, which helps to ſkreen him from a ſenſe of his own miſery. And

thus the ſenſual man ſpends the poor remains of life with very little ſenſe, and yet much fear of religion. And yet were this the worſt, happy were his caſe, in compariſon to what it really is: for ſenſual luſts war againſt the ſoul, againſt the very being itſelf, and will render it for ever unhappy and miſerable.

The ſenſual man has but one hope with reſpect to futurity, and a ſad one it is, that he may die like the beaſts that periſh: but nature, reaſon, religion, deny him even this comfort, and with one voice proclaim to us, *That God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world.* When that day comes, and he ſhall ſtand before the throne of God with all his ſins about him, and every injured perſon ready to accuſe and demand juſtice againſt him, it is much eaſier to imagine what his diſtreſs and miſery will be, than for any words to deſcribe it. Be the conſequence of that day what it will, it muſt be fatal to ſinners. Should the much talked-of, and the more wiſhed-for annihilation be their doom, it is a ſentence that deſtroys both body and ſoul; a ſentence ſhocking to nature, and terrible to all our apprehenſions; and to which nothing but a guilty conſcience, and a fearful expectation of ſomething worſe, could poſſibly reconcile the ſentiments of a man. But neither will this be the caſe: there is a fire that ſhall never go out prepared for the ſpirits of the wicked, a worm that never dies ready to torment them. It may be aſked perhaps, Do you mean a material fire, and a material worm? In good truth I am little concerned to anſwer this queſtion: there is one who will anſwer it, even he who ſaid it. There is nothing I think ſo weak as the diſputes

about future puniſhments. Do you imagine that God wants means of puniſhing ſinners effectually? or do you think that, when he comes to puniſh ſin, you ſhall have a ſaving bargain, and that your preſent enjoyments will be worth all you can ſuffer for them hereafter? If you imagine this, you muſt think God a very weak being: but if you think him a wiſe governor, reſt ſatisfied that there is nothing to be got by offending him; and that it is a fooliſh encouragement you give yourſelf, in imagining that the pains of hell will be leſs tormenting than they are repreſented to be, when you may be ſure, from the power and wiſdom of God, that the pleaſures of ſin will be too dearly purchaſed at the price of them.

But to return to the argument before us: let us look back, and take a ſhort view of the ſenſual man's condition. In this world his paſſions find ſo much employment for his reaſon, that he is excluded from the improvements peculiar to a rational being, and which might recommend him to the favour of his Maker: with reſpect to his fellow-creatures he is void of morality: with reſpect to God he is void of religion: he has a body worn out by ſin, and a mind hardened by it: in his youth he ſtrives to forget God, in his old age he cannot remember him: he dies fuller of ſins than of years, and goes down with heavineſs to the grave, and his iniquities follow him, and will riſe with him again when God calls him to appear and anſwer for himſelf: then will his luſts and appetites, and all the ſins which attended on them, riſe up in judgment againſt him, and ſink his ſoul into everlaſting mi-

ſery. The ſum then of his account is this: the ſenſual man has his portion of enjoyment in this world with the brutes, and in the next his puniſhment with wicked ſpirits. This is the war which the luſts of the fleſh wage againſt the ſoul: from ſuch enemies a wiſe man ought to fly, for they have power not only to deſtroy the body, but *to caſt both body and ſoul into hell.*

DISCOURSE XXIV.

MATTHEW xxvii. 38.

Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left.

WHAT different effects the judgments of God have upon the minds of men, may be learned from theſe examples now before us. Here are two thieves crucified with our bleſſed Saviour; two, who were probably guilty of the ſame crimes, and now under the ſame condemnation; both brought by the providence of God to ſuffer in the company of his own Son, whoſe blood was ſhed for the ſins of the whole world. But mark the end of theſe men: one died reproaching and blaſpheming Chriſt, and breathed out his ſoul in the agonies of guilt and deſpair; the other ſaw, acknowledged, and openly confeſſed his Redeemer, and expired with the ſound of thoſe bleſſed words in his ears, *To-day ſhalt thou be with me in paradiſe.*

How adorable is the wiſdom of God, who has thus inſtructed us; and, by ſetting the examples of his juſtice and mercy ſo near together, has taught us to fear without deſpair, and to hope without preſumption! Who would not tremble for himſelf,

when he ſees the man periſh in his ſins who died by his Saviour's ſide; within reach of that blood which was poured out for his redemption, but wanting faith to ſtretch out his hand, and be ſaved.?

What would the dying ſinner give to have his Saviour ſo near him in his laſt moments, that he might pour out his ſoul before him, and ſeize by violence the hand which alone is able to ſave? Yet he who had all theſe advantages enjoyed none of them; but died in his ſins, void of hope and of comfort.

Muſt the ſinner then deſpair, and has God forgot to be merciful? No: caſt your eyes on the other ſide of the croſs, and there you may ſee the mercy of God diſplayed in the brighteſt colours. There hangs the penitent, ſurrounded with all the terrors of approaching death; yet in the midſt of all calm and ſerene, confeſſing his ſins, glorifying the juſtice of God in his own puniſhment, rebuking the blaſphemy of his companion, juſtifying the innocence of his Saviour, and adoring him even in the loweſt ſtate of miſery; and at laſt receiving the certain promiſe of a bleſſed immortality.

Thus the caſe ſtands with all the allowances made to it which ſeem moſt to favour a death-bed repentance: and yet, as if the Scripture had ſaid nothing of the wretch who died blaſpheming and reproaching Chriſt, nor given us any cauſe to fear that a wicked life may end in an hardened and obdurate death; the caſe of the penitent only is drawn into example, and ſuch hopes are built on it, as are neither conſiſtent with the laws of God, nor the terms of man's ſalvation; for even of this ex-

ample the moſt prepoſterous and abſurd uſe is made. This penitent, as ſoon as he came to the knowledge of Chriſt, repented of his ſins: if you are fond of the example, *Go and do likewiſe:* if you delay, and purſue the pleaſures of ſin, upon the encouragement which this inſtance affords you, it is plain, that you like nothing in the repentance, but only the lateneſs of it; and that your inclinations are to imitate the thief, rather than the penitent Chriſtian. Once he lived by violence, in defiance of the laws of God and man: when he was penitent, he abhorred and deteſted his iniquities. Which part would you imitate? If both, if like him you propoſe to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin, and like him to repent and enjoy the pleaſures of heaven, you mightily impoſe on yourſelf; his caſe can never be yours, and therefore his example cannot be your ſecurity. Beſides, were the caſe indeed parallel to that of the dying Chriſtian, yet ſtill it can afford no certain hope; ſince the proof is as ſtrong from the caſe of the impenitent thief, that you ſhall die in your ſins; as it can be from the other caſe, that you ſhall repent of them.

It would take up too much of your time to conſider this caſe diſtinctly in all its views: I ſhall therefore only briefly hint to you the circumſtances which diſtinguiſh it from that of the dying Chriſtian; and then proceed to ſhew what little hope this example affords, allowing the caſe to be what it is generally ſuppoſed to be.

Firſt then; In all this perhaps there may be nothing reſembling a death-bed repentance. It is no

uncommon thing for malefactors to lie in prison a long time, before they are brought to trial and execution; and if that is the present case, there is room enough for the conversion of this criminal before he came to suffer. The circumstances incline this way. How came he to be so well acquainted with the innocence of Christ, if he never heard of him till he met him on the cross? How came it into his head to address to him in the manner he does, *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom?* What were the marks of royalty that were to be discovered on the cross? what the signs of dignity and power? What could lead him to think that his fellow-sufferer had a title to any kingdom? what to imagine, that he was Lord of the world that is to come? These circumstances make it probable that he had elsewhere learned the character and dignity of Christ, and came persuaded of the truth of his mission: and what is this to them, who have no desire to lie down Christians upon their death-bed, though they would willingly go off penitents?

Secondly, Suppose this great work were begun and finished on the cross; yet it cannot be drawn into example by Christian sinners: because the conversion of a Jew or an Heathen is one thing, and the repentance of a Christian is another. The promises of God, through Christ, are so far certain, that whenever an unbeliever repents and is converted, his sins shall be forgiven. This was the penitent's case; and therefore the pardon granted to him answers directly to baptismal regeneration; and

nothing to do with a death-bed repentance; can at all affect them who have fallen from ce once received. For,

Thirdly, The profligate life of this unconverted ner was not attended with ſuch aggravating cir- nſtances as the ſins of Chriſtians are. He ſinned inſt the light of nature, and the common rules reaſon and morality: but it might at leaſt be d for him, that he was the unhappy ſon of an happy father, conceived in the degenerate and rrupted ſtate of nature; that he wanted both the ıſe and knowledge, the hopes and fears, and the lps and aſſiſtances, which the Goſpel affords for ſtroying the power and dominion of ſin: and e greater his weakneſs was, the fitter object of ercy was he; and becauſe he had not been freed r grace from the power of ſin, he had the better ea to be freed by mercy from puniſhment. But e there the ſame excuſes, or the ſame hopes of ırdon for Chriſtians, who ſin againſt knowledge, ;ainſt the powerful motives of hope and fear, and deſpite of the Holy Spirit, with which they were aled? To ſin in hopes of pardon, and upon the :oſpect of future repentance, is itſelf a great ag- ravation of ſin, and a ſad abuſe of the mercy of lod.

If the Heathen ſins, he ſins under thoſe infirmi- es of nature for which Chriſt died; but the Chriſ- an ſins under the uſe of all the remedies which ıe Goſpel has provided, and which were purchaſed or him by his dying Saviour. The condition of ıankind after the fall afforded, without doubt, ıany arguments of pity and compaſſion; and ſuch

arguments as moved the Son of God to undertake their redemption. The ignorant, the unenlightened ſinner has right to plead all theſe arguments in his own behalf: his is the common cauſe of mankind; and nature, with unutterable groans, cries for him and all her children before her great Creator.

If the penitent received the firſt knowledge of Chriſt upon the croſs; yet how much more had he to ſay for himſelf, than the Chriſtian, who comes to make his peace at the hour of death? He might thus plead his unhappy cauſe: "Lord, I am one "of thoſe ſinners, for whom thy Son now expires "upon the croſs; I was conceived in ſin, and "brought forth in iniquity; I have wandered in "ignorance and darkneſs, without the light of thy "Goſpel to direct me, without the help of thy "Spirit to protect me: why was all my life ſo "dark, and theſe few laſt minutes only bleſſed "with the knowledge of thy Son? Lord, accept "the poor remains of life, ſince it is all I have left "to offer: my lateſt breath ſhall confeſs my own "guilt, and my Saviour's innocence: and ſince thy "wiſdom has united me to him in this croſs, let "me never more part from him; but as I am "joined with him in his death, ſo let me be like-"wiſe in his life for evermore." But what ſhall the dying Chriſtian ſay, after an hardened life of ſin and impenitence? What words ſhall we put in his mouth to appeaſe the anger of his injured Redeemer? You may ſpend your time in lamenting your paſt folly; but with what language will you approach to God? You have neither ignorance nor weakneſs to plead; you were enlightened with his

word; and his Holy Spirit was ever ready to aſſiſt you, had you been ready to endeavour after holineſs. What will you then ſay, when frightened and amazed you call for mercy at your laſt moments? May not the Lord then ſay, "How long "have I waited in vain for theſe prayers, and theſe "ſighs? how have I ſpoken to you by your con- "ſcience within, and by the miniſtry of my word "from without; and how have my calls been de- "ſpiſed? The gates of mercy were always open to "you, but you ſhut them againſt yourſelf: but "though you could fly from the mercy of God, "yet his juſtice will overtake you." Conſider but this calmly with yourſelves, and you will find that the wicked Chriſtian's caſe is ſo much worſe than the penitent's upon the croſs, that there can be no reaſon for you to encourage yourſelves upon this example; or to hope for the ſame mercy, when your caſe will be greatly different. Theſe are ſuch circumſtances as enter into the nature of the caſe, and will make it always unfit, and oftentimes impoſſible, to be imitated by a Chriſtian. But there are other circumſtances fit to be obſerved, which render a death-bed repentance very inſecure and dangerous, though we ſhould allow it all the hopes which have been raiſed from the caſe before us.

As, firſt; He that ſins in hopes of repenting at laſt, may ſin ſo far, as to grow hardened and obdurate, and incapable of repentance when the time comes. This reflection is grounded upon the caſe of the impenitent thief; who was crucified with our Saviour; who, though he had certainly all the outward advantages which the penitent had, yet he

made no ſtep towards repentance, but died reproaching Chriſt, and joining with thoſe who crucified him, in that bitter jeer, *If thou be the Chriſt, come down from the croſs.* Or, if you want more evidence, this example may be backed by many more in our own time; it being no uncommon thing to ſee malefactors die ſtupid and ſenſeleſs, and go out of the world as wickedly as they have lived in it: and what can this be attributed to, but to the deſertion of God's Holy Spirit, which will not always ſtrive with ſinners, but ſometimes leaves them to periſh in the hardneſs of their hearts? So that the man who ſins in hopes of repenting, can never be ſure of this laſt retreat; becauſe by purſuing the firſt part of his deſign, that is, to enjoy the pleaſure of ſin, he may ſoon grow incapable of the laſt, which is repenting. I queſtion not but that thoſe who reſerve themſelves to theſe laſt hopes of repenting, mean ſincerely to do it when the time comes; for hardly can I think that any man means to ſuffer for his ſins: but then thoſe who enter upon ſin with theſe tender regards to their own ſouls, ſoon grow above ſuch mean thoughts, and would ſcorn to own themſelves in the number of thoſe who are candidates for repentance: they contract a familiarity with ſin, and, with Solomon's fools, learn to *make a mock of it*, till by degrees their conſciences are hardened, and not to be touched by thoſe ſoft impreſſions which at the firſt ſetting out they felt from the languiſhing remains of grace. And from hence it comes to paſs, that when theſe ſinners lie down upon a ſick bed, they often want both the will and the power to aſk forgiveneſs; and,

by an habitual neglect of all parts of religion, become unable to perform any, even that in which all their poor hopes are concluded, to repent of, and aſk pardon for, their ſins. Nor is it in your own power to ſin to what degree you pleaſe, or to preſerve a ſenſe of religion, amidſt the pleaſures of iniquity: if it were, poſſibly the danger in this reſpect might be leſs: but habits grow inſenſibly; there is a kind of mechaniſm in it, as in the growth of the body; and he that gives himſelf up to ſin can no more reſolve how great a ſinner he will be, than he that is born a man can reſolve how tall, or how ſhort, of ſtature he will be. To the truth of this experience daily witneſſes: happy are thoſe who want this fatal experience! With how much pain and uneaſineſs do men bring themſelves to do the things which in a little time they glory and take pride in, or at leaſt grow eaſy and contented under? And thus the man, who with great tremblings of heart, and miſgivings of mind, brings himſelf to taſte the pleaſures of ſin, with reſolutions of an after repentance, comes at laſt to be ſo well reconciled to his ſins, as not to think repentance neceſſary for them. The moment you give yourſelf up to ſin, you give yourſelf out of your own power; you lay the chains upon the neck of reaſon, and ſet the paſſions free: conſcience, which uſed to be your advance-guard, and give you early notice of every approaching evil, falls into the power of luſt and affection: and when reaſon and conſcience are deſtroyed, the triple cord is broken, and religion muſt ſoon follow after; and how, in this general rout, one poor reſolution, to repent of all this ini-

quity, ſhould eſcape, is more than can be eaſily conceived: and yet when you loſe that, you loſe yourſelf; it is your laſt, your only hope. Upon the whole, there is much more reaſon to fear, that ſin, if once you indulge it, ſhould get the better of and deſtroy your reſolution of repentance, than that your reſolution to repent ſhould ever conquer and deſtroy the confirmed powers and habits of ſin. And I wiſh thoſe who have not yet put it out of their own power to reaſon calmly upon theſe things, would enter into this debate with their own hearts, and conſider what danger they are in: a few moments cannot be too much to ſpend in ſo weighty an affair: and whenever you retire to theſe cool thoughts, may the Father of mercies influence thoſe moments of your life, upon which all eternity depends!

But, ſecondly, could you preſerve your reſolutions of repentance, yet ſtill it is not in your own power to ſecure an opportunity to execute them. The thief upon the croſs died a violent death, by the hand of juſtice; happy in this at leaſt, that he knew how long he had to live; and had no ground to flatter himſelf with the hopes of many years to come. He had no pretence to defer his repentance, in proſpect of a farther opportunity; nor was his heart to be allured by the ſoft and entertaining pleaſures of life, when life itſelf was ſo near expiring. From the like death God defend us all! and yet, without it, which of us can hope for ſuch favourable circumſtances for repentance? Whenever the ſinner thinks of repentance, he will find that he has a work of great ſorrow and trouble upon his hands; and this will make him unwilling

o ſet about it. No man is ſo old but that he hinks he may laſt out one year more: and then, hy will not to-morrow ſerve for repentance as well s to-day? And thus the great work is delayed, till ickneſs or natural infirmities render him incapable f it. It was the ſight of this ſtrange deluſion in hich men live, ſtill promiſing themſelves longer ife, and upon thoſe hopes deferring the neceſſary ork of eternity, which made the holy Pſalmiſt break forth into that moving petition: *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wiſdom.* The way that men generally number their days can produce nothing but folly and wickedneſs: the many years to come, which they rejoice in, ſerve only to make them careleſs and negligent, and thoughtleſs of the great concerns of immortality: and whether men are not deluded by theſe hopes, let any one judge. Do but ſuppoſe that you were in the thief's caſe, and certainly to die upon a fixed day: do you not think that you ſhould have other thoughts, other concerns about you? Could you then delay your repentance, and ſay, To-morrow will be time enough? If you would not do it then, why will you do it now? Only for this reaſon, that you think you have time enough in reſerve to do this work hereafter. And ſo you may continue to think with as much reaſon as you do now, till death, or the ſickneſs which leads to it, ſurpriſes you. And hence it comes to paſs that very few, who ſin with reſolutions of repentance, ever think of it till they are confined to a ſick bed; becauſe as long as they are in health, they have always this anſwer ready, It will be time enough hereafter. So that the un-

fortunate end, to which juſtice brought this penitent upon the croſs, was, with reſpect to his converſion, an advantage that few Chriſtians will give themſelves: the certainty of his death made his repentance certain, permitted him no delays, no vain excuſes, no flattering hopes of better opportunities hereafter.

Thirdly, Conſidering that Chriſtians, who propoſe to themſelves this example of the thief upon the croſs, ſeldom repent till they are warned by ſickneſs to prepare for death; they will evidently want another advantage, which this penitent had. His death not being the effect of any bodily pain or diſtemper, but of the judge's ſentence, he brought with him to the croſs, which, if you pleaſe, you may call his death-bed, a ſound body and mind. He had his ſenſes perfect, his reaſon freſh and undiſturbed; and was capable of performing ſuch acts of faith and devotion, as were neceſſary to his repentance and converſion. But how different often is the caſe of the ſick and languiſhing ſinner! Perhaps he labours under ſuch acute pains, as will give him no reſpite for thought or reflection; or perhaps he dozes, and lies ſtupid, without knowing his friends and relations, or even himſelf; or perhaps the diſtemper ſeizes his head, and he raves and is diſtracted, loſes his ſenſe and reaſon, and every thing of the man, but the outward ſhape, before his death. And are not theſe hopeful circumſtances for repentance? Is a man likely to know and find out his Saviour, when he knows not even his own brother who ſtands by his bed-ſide? Theſe are very common circumſtances, and ſuch as render repent-

e impracticable. But ſhould the ſinner eſcape all ſe accidents, and go off gently without being for-en by his ſenſe or reaſon; yet ſtill it may hap-, and often it does, that his promiſed repentance duces nothing but horror and deſpair. In his -time he flattered himſelf with unreaſonable es of mercy, and now he begins to ſee how un-ſonable they were: now he can think of nothing, that he is going to appear before his Judge, to eive the juſt rewards of wickedneſs: he ſees him ady clothed with wrath and majeſty; and forms hin his own tormented breaſt the whole proceſs the laſt day. If he ſleeps, he dreams of judg-nt and miſery; and when he wakes, believes his ams forebode his fate. Thus reſtleſs and uneaſy, s void of comfort and hope, without confidence ſk pardon, without faith to receive it, does the tched ſinner expire, and has the misfortune to his hopes die before him. In a word then, put the favourable circumſtances together that you imagine; bring the ſinner by the gentleſt de-s of nature to his latter end; give him the faireſt l the longeſt warning; yet ſtill you give him no rity: if he is not ſenſible of his ſin and im-itence, he will die, like the wicked thief upon croſs, reproaching Chriſt, hardened and obdu-: againſt the thoughts of judgment: or, if he nes to a ſenſe, and ſees his own unworthineſs, v ſhall he be preſerved from deſpair, and ſuch a ad of his righteous Judge, as will make him nei-r fit to live, nor fit to die? Nothing but an ex-rdinary degree of grace can preſerve him in a per fit for repentance, free on one ſide from

confidence and preſumption, on the other from ſlaviſh fear which caſts out love, which may produce ſorrow, but not repentance. And whether thoſe who have lived under the continual calls of grace to virtue and holineſs, who have rejected the counſel of God whilſt they had health and ſtrength to ſerve, ſhall be thought worthy of ſuch extraordinary mercy at laſt, let any reaſonable man judge. It cannot be ſuppoſed that God intends to ſave Chriſtians in this way; which would be at once to evacuate all the rules and duties of the Goſpel. Chriſt came to deſtroy ſin and the works of the devil; but were men promiſed forgiveneſs upon the account of a few ſighs and tears at laſt, this would effectually eſtabliſh and confirm the kingdom of Satan. Though God has promiſed pardon to penitent ſinners, yet his promiſe muſt be expounded ſo as to be conſiſtent with his deſign in ſending Chriſt into the world; and then it can never be extended to thoſe, who uſe the Goſpel as a protection to wickedneſs, and ſin becauſe God has promiſed to be merciful. In a word, you have the promiſes of the Goſpel ſet before you, you have the mercies of God in Chriſt offered to you; if you will accept them, and do your part, happy are you: but if you are for finding out new ways to ſalvation, if you ſeek to reconcile the pleaſures and profits of ſin with the hopes of the Goſpel, you do but deceive yourſelves; for *God is not mocked*, nor will he regard thoſe who make ſuch perverſe uſe of his mercy.

What then remains, but that all who love their own ſouls ſeek the Lord whilſt happily he may be

l; and work for their ſalvation whilſt they
the light; *for the night cometh, when no man*
ork. The night cometh on apace, and brings
it a change which every mortal muſt undergo.
ı ſhall we be forſaken of all our pleaſures and
ments, and deſerted by thoſe gay thoughts
ı now ſupport our fooliſh hearts againſt the
of religion. The time cometh, and who, O
, may abide its coming! when we muſt ſtand
e the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt; when the
:ſt and the loweſt ſhall be placed on the ſame
expecting a new diſtribution of honours and
ds. In that day the ſtouteſt heart will trem-
ınd the countenance of the proudeſt man will
n the preſence of his injured Lord. I ſpeak
o you the ſuggeſtion of ſuperſtition or fear,
he words of ſoberneſs and of truth. May they
into your hearts, and yield you the fruits of
ual joy and comfort here, and of glory and
ɔrtality hereafter!

DISCOURSE XXV.

PART I.

PSALM lxxvii. 9, 10.

Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger ſhut up his tender mercies?
And I ſaid, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Moſt High.

WHOEVER was the author of this pſalm, he was manifeſtly under a great dejection of mind when he penned it: he ſpeaks of himſelf as deteſted of God, and given up to be a prey to the ſorrows of his own diſturbed, tormented heart. *His ſoul refuſed comfort*, as he complains in the ſecond verſe: *When he remembered God, he was troubled; when he complained, his ſpirit was overwhelmed*, as he laments in the third verſe.

What the particular grief was, which gave riſe to this mournful complaint, does not appear; but whatever it was, the ſting of it lay in this, that the Pſalmiſt apprehended himſelf to be forſaken of God: and without doubt this is of all afflictions the moſt afflicting, the moſt inſupportable; a grief it is,

which no medicine can reach, which all the powers of reaſon can hardly aſſiſt, for *the ſoul refuſes to be comforted.*

Theſe fears, theſe ſorrows, belong not to the vicious and profligate, who *have not God in all their thoughts:* they live without reflection, and therefore without concern; and can be extremely diverted with hearing or ſeeing what modeſt and humble ſinners ſuffer from a ſenſe of religion: but, bold and fearleſs as ſuch men are, their day of fear is not far off, it draws near apace; and, when it comes, will convince them of the truth of the wiſe preacher's obſervation; *The heart of the wiſe is in the houſe of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the houſe of mirth.*

There is a very great difference between the miſgivings and miſapprehenſions of a religious mind, and the fear to which ſinners are always expoſed, and which oftentimes they experience. The fears of the religious are frequently ill-grounded, and ariſe from their not rightly conſidering and underſtanding their own caſe, or the methods of God's providence in relation to this world: but the ſinner's fear is never ill-grounded, for if the profligate ſinner has not reaſon to fear God, there can be no ſuch thing as a reaſonable fear in the world. The religious man may fear in the hours of his weakneſs and infirmity; the ſinner can only fear when he comes to his right reaſon, and a due ſenſe of his condition.

This obſervation will ſerve to diſtinguiſh between the fears to which the religious are ſubject, and which the text leads us to conſider; and the fears

of guilt, which are foreign to our preſent purpoſe, and to be treated in quite a different manner.

That the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks of the ſorrows of a religious well diſpoſed heart, is manifeſt from the deſcription he gives of his conduct and behaviour under his diſtreſs: he was ſorely troubled, but *in the day of his trouble he ſought the Lord*, (verſe 2.) He was afflicted, but in his affliction he *remembered God*, (verſe 3.) Whatever doubts he entertained as to his own condition, and the favour of God towards him, yet of the being, the power, and wiſdom of God he never doubted. This faith, which in his utmoſt extremity he held faſt, proved to be his ſheet-anchor, and ſaved him from the ſhipwreck which the ſtorms and tempeſts raiſed in his own breaſt ſeemed to threaten.

It is worth our while to obſerve the train of thought which this afflicted good man purſued, and what were the reflections in which he reſted at laſt, as his beſt and only comfort and ſupport.

Whether the calamities which afflicted him were private to himſelf, or public to his people and country; yet as long as his thoughts dwelt on them, and led him into expoſtulations with God for the ſeverity of his judgments, he found no eaſe or relief. A weak man cannot rightly judge of the actions even of a man wiſer than himſelf, of whoſe views and deſigns he is not maſter; much leſs can any man judge of the ways of God, to whoſe councils he is not admitted, and to whoſe ſecrets he is a ſtranger. And though it is but too natural for men, when they conſider the ſins of others, to complain for want of juſtice in the world, and when they conſider

their own, of want of mercy; yet in both caſes do they act weakly and inconſiſtently, pretending to judge where they want not only authority to decide, but even underſtanding ſufficient to try, the cauſe. The Pſalmiſt complained heavily, *Has God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger ſhut up his tender mercies?* But what did he get by this complaint? was he not forced immediately to confeſs the impropriety and folly of it? *I ſaid, This is my infirmity.* He ſaid very rightly: in complaining, he followed the natural impreſſions of paſſion and impatience; in acknowledging the folly of his complaint, he ſpoke not only the language of grace, but of ſenſe and reaſon.

What muſt we do then? ſince it is weakneſs to complain, and folly to judge, of the methods of God's providence, what is there left for us to do? and what part muſt we take? Muſt religion be ſenſeleſs and ſtupid, and ſhut out all reflection on the ways of God? No: one way there is ſtill left open to us; to truſt, and to depend on God: and a way it is ſo far from being ſenſeleſs and ſtupid, that in purſuit of it we ſhall ſee opening before us the nobleſt views that reaſon or religion can afford.

I am not preſcribing to you a method of my own, it is the very method the Pſalmiſt preſcribed to himſelf. *God has not left himſelf without witneſs*; the great works of nature and of grace proclaim aloud his lovingkindneſs to the children of men. If we conſider them attentively, we muſt admire his power and adore his goodneſs: and when we ſee ſuch power united with ſo much goodneſs towards us, it is but a natural ſtep to throw ourſelves upon

his protection; to truſt the hand that once made us, and has always ſaved us. When I complain, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *It is my infirmity*; but *I will remember the years of the right hand of the Moſt High. I will remember the works of the Lord: ſurely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate alſo of all thy works, and talk of all thy doings.* Here then was his comfort, here the cure of all his grief: the ſcene around him was dark and gloomy; but, dark as it was, it was under the guidance and direction of the hand that had never failed the faithful, to deliver him out of all his troubles.

The text, and the occaſion of it, thus explained, lead us to conſider theſe two propoſitions:

Firſt, That all complaints againſt Providence proceed from weakneſs and the infirmity of human reaſon.

Secondly, That a ſettled peace of mind, with reſpect to God, muſt ariſe from a due contemplation of the great works of Providence, which God has laid open to our view for our conſideration and inſtruction.

The firſt propoſition is, That all complaints againſt Providence proceed from weakneſs and the infirmity of human reaſon. Under this head are included all the ſuſpicions that are apt to riſe in men's minds againſt Providence, as well as the formal complaints brought againſt it. And the firſt of this ſort, which naturally preſents itſelf to the mind, when we conſider God and ourſelves, is this, that God is too great and too excellent a being to humble himſelf to behold the things that are on earth. This one miſtake ſeems to have been the

whole of Epicurus's divinity. He thought it would be endleſs for the gods to attend to every thing that paſſed on earth, and to concern themſelves with the conduct and behaviour of every particular man in the world: he thought they could not do this without being moved ſometimes to anger and reſentment, and ſometimes to the paſſion of joy; which he conceived to be equally inconſiſtent with an uniform ſettled ſtate of happineſs. To make therefore his gods happy, he removed them from all government of men, and left men to ſhift as they could, without God or Providence, in the world.

The ſame thought has in all times been the refuge of ſinners; their language has ever been, *How doth God know, and is there knowledge in the Moſt High?* Perhaps too this ſuſpicion has entered into better minds, broken with grief and affliction, and tempted by their misfortunes to think that God regards not the things below.

But how different ſoever the grounds of this ſuſpicion may be in one caſe, and in another, yet in every caſe it is manifeſtly weak and unreaſonable.

To imagine that it is too much trouble, or any trouble, to God to govern the world, and all the beings in it, is a mere childiſh conceit; it is talking of God, as if God were a man, and as liable to be fatigued and tired with multiplicity of buſineſs as a man is. How do you know that there is any thing tireſome or diſagreeable in much buſineſs, and in variety of employment? It is true, you find it is ſo in yourſelf, and you obſerve it is ſo in others: you may therefore very well conclude, that much buſineſs is tireſome to men like yourſelf: but by what

reaſon do you extend this concluſion to God? unleſs you think he is in this reſpect like you, and that he has no larger powers and abilities than you have.

As it is abſurd to argue from the powers of men to the powers of God, ſo it is likewiſe to argue from the paſſions of men to the affections of the Deity. Men may be grieved and tormented with ſeeing affairs under their conduct go wrong, may be overjoyed at ſome unexpected ſucceſs; but can this ever be the caſe of a being of infinite power and infinite wiſdom? Nothing can happen but what he orders or permits, for his power is over all: nothing that he orders or permits can be wrong, for his wiſdom is equal to his power. What diſappointments then are there to grieve him? What unexpected ſucceſs to tranſport him? You ſee now that this ſuſpicion, which ſet out with ſuppoſing God to be ſo great and excellent a being, that the affairs of men were below his care, concludes with making him ſo like a man, as not to be able to bear the fatigue and vexation of ſo much buſineſs.

Epicurus and his followers, who denied God's government of the world, denied alſo that he made it. So far at leaſt they were conſiſtent; for if they thought it too much trouble for God to govern the world, they could not conſiſtently put him to the trouble of making it. But if we turn the argument, and begin with conſidering the works of the creation, and, according to the inſtruction of the Pſalmiſt, *call to remembrance thoſe years of the right hand of the Moſt High*; we ſhall from theſe manifeſt and undeniable works of God be led to juſt concluſions with

reſpect to the methods of divine Providence, leſs obvious to our obſervation, in the government of the world. When we ſhall ſee the hand of God employed in forming the loweſt, and, in our eyes, the moſt contemptible creatures on earth; ranging and adjuſting all the parts of the world ſo, that there is not a particle of matter but what has its proper place in ſubſerviency to the whole of the creation; it will be impoſſible for a reaſonable man to think that God has no care of this world, which with ſo much care and wiſdom he created; or that it ſhould be below him to preſerve thoſe beings, which he did not think it below him to make. But this conſideration belongs to the ſecond propoſition, and will meet us again in its proper place. To proceed then;

Another reaſon, which ſome have for ſuſpecting that the affairs of the world are not under the conduct of Providence, is, that they cannot diſcern any certain marks of God's interpoſing: on the contrary, they think it evident, that all the inanimate and irrational parts of the world follow a certain courſe of nature invariably; and that men act with all the ſigns of being given up to follow their own devices, without being either directed or reſtrained by a ſuperior power.

That many men talk and think in this way there is no doubt. The ſcoffers in St. Peter's time ſupported themſelves upon this obſervation, *that all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*; concluding, that they would go on ſo for ever, and there was nothing beyond this preſent ſtate of things for which they ought to be concerned.

But in this way of reaſoning there are two great miſtakes:

1. That the concluſion is not rightly drawn from the obſervation, ſuppoſing the obſervation to be true.

2. Suppoſing the concluſion to be true, it will not anſwer the purpoſe intended.

1. That the material world continues to anſwer the purpoſes for which it was created, is ſurely, when rightly conſidered, the ſtrongeſt evidence that it was made, and is conducted, by the higheſt wiſdom and power. Is it any praiſe to a workman, or any proof of his ſkill and ability, that the houſe of his building is running to ruin? and that it wants reforming and ſupporting every year? Surely every man would chooſe, if he could, to have his habitation ſecured againſt the injuries of time and accidents. And can we expect leſs of an houſe, whoſe builder is God, than that it ſhould continue firm and ſtable, and without decay, during the time intended and limited for its continuance? If all things therefore continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, it proves that they were extremely well made at firſt, and have been extremely well preſerved ever ſince: and can this afford to a man of any thought or reflection an objection againſt Providence?

It may be ſaid, perhaps, that it is not merely the continuing of the world that is the objection, but its continuing always in one unwearied courſe. The ſun riſes and ſets now, juſt as it did three or four thouſand years ago: and what ſign is there of wiſdom or contrivance in doing the ſame thing over

and over again for ages together? This obſervation can ariſe only from what we ſee among men; and, with reſpect to men, there is foundation for it: but it is great weakneſs, and want of thought, to transfer this obſervation to the works of God. Men are improving daily in knowledge and experience, and may have good reaſon to alter this year what they did the laſt, the better to ſuit their pleaſure or convenience: but can any man be ſo weak as to think this to be the caſe of the Almighty? Do you imagine God was young and unexperienced when he made the world, and that he ſees faults in it now which he did not ſee then? If you do not think this, what reaſon can you give why the world ſhould not go on now as it did from the beginning? If God made it in the beſt manner at firſt, and without doubt he did, can there be any juſt cauſe for alteration?

But farther; ſuppoſing the obſervation true, that the world is now where it was at the beginning; yet no concluſion can be drawn from thence as to the future continuance of the world. For though this ſyſtem of things ſhall keep its appointed courſe, during the time determined by God for its continuance; yet neither can the preſent nor the paſt ſtate of things enable us in the leaſt degree to judge when the end will be. And whoever reaſons in this way, may juſt as well ſay, Such a man lived in good health the laſt twenty years, and therefore he ſhall live in good health for twenty more. The argument concludes alike in both caſes, however the abſurdity may appear ſhocking only in one.

But ſuppoſing we ſhould allow even the concluſion

to be right, and that the material world may go on without end: what is it to the purpoſe? Whatever becomes of the world, you can laſt but a little time. Your condition hereafter will not depend upon the laſting of the ſun or moon, or be in the leaſt influenced by it. Let them move on for ever; yet if you in the mean time are to be miſerable, and to ſuffer for your iniquities, what will you be the better for it? If this world ſhould laſt for ever, may there not be other ſtates for the reception of good and bad ſpirits, when ſeparate from the body? If there may, how is religion, or the belief of God's government in the rational and moral world, at all concerned in this ſpeculation? And how weak and how abſurd a thing is it for men, who know they muſt die, and may die to-day or to-morrow, to harden their hearts againſt the belief of Providence, by ſpeculating upon the durableneſs of things without themſelves; when their only true concern is, and ought to be, to know what will become of themſelves, being very ſure that they cannot continue long here? Our Saviour has told us, that in his *Father's houſe are many manſions*: this manſion in which we now live may continue, and yet we may be transferred to other manſions to be happy or miſerable, according as we have behaved ourſelves in this.

Let us conſider now, whether the other part of the objection, pointed againſt God's moral government of the world, has any better foundation in reaſon to ſupport it.

The great irregularity obſervable in human actions, and the miſchiefs and iniquities which abound

in the world, have tempted ſome to think that God concerns not himſelf with the actions of men, but has given them up entirely to follow their own devices.

It is truly and juſtly obſerved, that there is this difference between the material and rational parts of the world; that the material world, and the ſeveral parts of it, act regularly and uniformly, purſuing conſtantly the ends and appointments of nature; whilſt moral agents act variouſly, and often inconſiſtently with the great ends to which they are ordained. But I wonder any man, capable of making this obſervation, ſhould not at the ſame time ſee the true reaſon of it, ſuppoſing both parts to be under God's government.

Matter, being capable of no action of itſelf, muſt neceſſarily follow the impreſſions it receives: ſuppoſing God to govern the world, the material parts of it muſt follow the immediate impreſſions of his hand; and where God is the mover, can you expect any thing leſs than order and regularity, and a conſtant ſubſerviency to the great ends of the creation? To ſuppoſe therefore the material world to move irregularly and inconſiſtently with the end to be ſerved, would be ſuppoſing God to act irregularly and inconſiſtently with the end of his own creation.

But in the moral world the caſe is otherwiſe: men have a power of acting and chooſing for themſelves; and, were it otherwiſe, they could not be rational or moral agents. Were God, therefore, to determine the actions of men as abſolutely and uncontrollably as he directs the motions of the mate-

l world, men would be, to all intents and purpoſes, much parts of the material world as the trees and nts which grow in it. And ſuch a method of vernment would deſtroy and overthrow the very l for which rational agents were created: for, to at purpoſe was reaſon and underſtanding given men, but to guide and direct them, and to make m capable of diſcharging the duties of religion l morality? But if the powers of reaſon and un-ſtanding were to be perpetually overruled, to vent the irregularities and miſchiefs which pro-d from the free uſe of them; what would it be t making men rational and moral agents by the r of their creation, and then putting them under overnment which leaves no room for reaſon or ɔrality? Which is ſuch a part as no wiſe man uld act, and which no reaſonable man would aſ-be to God.

Indeed, this very difference obſervable in the ıducting the material and the moral world, is the ɔngeſt preſumption that the whole is under the ection of the all-wiſe Being. Upon ſuppoſition ıt God governs the world, would you not expect ſee all things directed in a way ſuitable to their ure, and the end for which they were made? ıterial beings require to be abſolutely and uncon-llably directed, for they have no power to direct mſelves; conſequently their motions muſt be t and regular, or otherwiſe, according to the dom and ability of the director: and if God that director, they muſt ever be juſt and re-ar.

Moral agents cannot be ſo directed; for it is

eſſential to the nature of a moral being to act and chooſe for itſelf: and the actions of ſuch beings will be wiſe and regular, in proportion to the wiſdom of ſuch beings; where they are weak and infirm, they will oftentimes be very irregular and blameworthy. That men are weak and infirm wants no proof; conſequently, there muſt be great ſigns of weakneſs and imperfection in their moral behaviour.

Since then it is evident, *a priori*, that the government of the world, ſuppoſing it to be under the government of God, muſt be what it now appears to be; it can be only want of thought and reflection which furniſhes objections, from the preſent ſtate of things, againſt a divine Providence.

But farther; though it is neceſſary to leave men, conſidered as moral agents, to chooſe and act freely; yet this is far from excluding the providence of God from interpoſing in human affairs: the reaſon is, becauſe this may be done many ways conſiſtently with the freedom of men; and wicked men may be puniſhed, and good men rewarded, even in this world, without overruling the wills or actions of either. A little reflection will clear this up to every man's mind; and therefore I ſhall ſay no more than is neceſſary to explain my meaning.

The power of life and death, which is in the hand of God, is alone ſufficient for conducting the great affairs of the world. It is natural for men to die; and when they do die, nobody is ſurpriſed at ſo common an event; and yet it is evident, that the wellbeing of whole nations often depends upon the life or death of a few men: let

them live, or let them die, nobody's liberty or freedom of action is affected by it; yet the peace and ſecurity of whole countries, or the utter ruin and deſtruction of them, may depend entirely on the event.

With reſpect to private men, and their happineſs or miſery here; if we conſider how much every man's good or ill fortune in the world depends upon variety of accidents, which may happen one way or other, but muſt happen as God ſhall think proper; it will be eaſy to conceive, that men may be effectually puniſhed for their iniquities, or rewarded for their virtue, by a train of things appearing to be natural and common, without the viſible interpoſition of Providence.

Theſe ſecret methods do not indeed juſtify the righteouſneſs of God in the eyes of men; nor is it pretended that they are made uſe of for an exact adminiſtration of juſtice in every caſe; but it is ſufficient if they are or may be uſed to all the neceſſary purpoſes of government over moral beings in a ſtate of probation; which is a very different thing from the final adminiſtration of juſtice. And whatever inequalities may appear to us in the diſtribution of good or evil in this life, they cannot ſtand as objections to God's government over the world, unleſs you can prove that there will be no day of reckoning hereafter: for, ſuppoſing a future ſtate, it is quite conſiſtent with divine juſtice to permit things to be as we ſee they are now; ſince juſtice does not ſleep, but waits with patience to ſee the full proof of the righteouſneſs or unrighteouſneſs of men.

When the appointed time ſhall come for diſſolving this frame of things, the material world will have done its office, and may lie by, till called out by the Creator to ſerve other uſes: but for the moral world there is another ſcene prepared, in which they muſt account for their conduct and behaviour in this; and anſwer for the uſe they made of thoſe great and excellent gifts of reaſon and underſtanding, with which God endowed them.

Lay all theſe things together, and conſider in one view the whole ſcheme of divine Providence: then try over again the miſgivings of mind, and the ſuſpicions you have entertained againſt God's government of the world, and you will perhaps ſee reaſon to confeſs your own weakneſs, and ſay with the Pſalmiſt, *It is mine own infirmity.*

DISCOURSE XXV.

PART II.

THE ſuſpicions which incline men to doubt whether God does at all concern himſelf in human affairs, have been conſidered: I ſhall proceed now to conſider the ſuſpicions which, conſiſtently with admitting a general care of Providence over the world, lead men to fear, that they themſelves are either neglected or unkindly treated by God. This ſeems to have been the Pſalmiſt's own caſe, and theſe the fears which poſſeſſed his mind. Of God's government of the world he entertained no doubt; he applied to him in his trouble and diſtreſs; but his grief was, that he found no return to his prayers; his ſorrows continued and increaſed: *when he remembered God, he was troubled; when he complained, his ſpirit was overwhelmed.*

But this good man, being well grounded in religion, was able ſo far to get the better of his doubts and fears, as to paſs a right judgment in his own caſe, and to pronounce of all his ſuſpicions, *This is my infirmity:* and to call to his aſſiſtance the proper reflections which the great works of Providence

adminiſtered for the ſupport and confirmation of his hope and confidence towards God, *I will remember the years of the right hand of the Moſt High.*

Now it being admitted that God is not regardleſs of the world, but that his providence is watchful for the preſervation of the whole, it may be doubted whether this care deſcends to particulars, and regards the actions and the well-being of individuals; which, ſingly conſidered, make but a ſmall part of the whole, and whoſe fortunes, be they good or bad, have very little influence upon the well-being of the whole.

If we conſider this ſuſpicion with reſpect to the material world, a little reflection will help us to diſcern that it is entirely groundleſs, and built upon the weak conceit, that it will be too troubleſome to Providence to attend to the very minute things of the world. For the minuteſt parts of matter follow the laws of God and nature as conſtantly and as regularly as the great conſtituent parts of the world, and work in their proper ſphere as ſtrongly for the good and preſervation of the whole. The warmth and comfort which you receive from the fire in your chamber, is as much owing to the laws and conſtitutions appointed and maintained by God, as the warmth and comfort you receive from the ſun: and the light of a candle is as truly the work of God, and as much depending upon his preſervation and execution of the laws of nature, as the light of the heavenly bodies. If any man thinks otherwiſe, let him try to account for theſe leſſer phænomena of nature, and he will find himſelf under the ſame neceſſity of recurring to the influence of a ſuperior

overruling power, as when he attempts to account for the motions of the great bodies in the firmament.

With reſpect to moral agents and God's government over them, the caſe is not quite ſo plain: and there is a plain reaſon why it is not; becauſe moral agents would not be moral agents, if they were as regularly moved by an overruling power as material beings are, and muſt be; ſince they can only act as they are acted, which is the reaſon why all their actings are regular and uniform, becauſe the immediate agent is God.

But with reſpect to particular men, and the care of Providence over them, we may conſider that every man conſiſts of two parts; one material, which is the body; another rational, which is the mind. With reſpect to the material part, every ſingle man manifeſtly depends upon the preſervation and care of Providence, as manifeſtly as the great bodies of the world depend on the ſame care. The motion of the heart in a man no more depends upon his will, or upon his own wiſdom, than the motion of the moon does. The ſame may be ſaid of all the animal functions which depend upon involuntary motions, not under the influence or direction of the will. The life then of every particular man, which depends upon theſe animal functions, depends upon the preſervation of Providence. And thus far we ſee, that by the ſame way of reaſoning, that we conclude God's government to extend to the whole of the creation, his care and government extends to individual men. This being allowed; can we poſſibly ſuppoſe that God, who ſhews ſo much care for

men, as they are material animal beings, ſhould entirely neglect them, conſidered as moral agents? This is the very queſtion which our Saviour aſks in a like caſe, Matt. vi. 26. *Behold*, ſays he, *the fowls of the air; for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns: yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?* In like manner we ſay, Behold yourſelves as ye are material beings; do not all the motions of the body, on which life depends, diſcover to you the hand of God ſupporting and maintaining your life and being here? Conſider once more; Are you not, as rational beings, and moral agents, much more worthy of his care? And can he, whoſe care deſcends to you as animals, be ſuppoſed to neglect you as moral agents?

But as ſtrong as this proof is, by way of inference and concluſion, we do not want more direct proofs of God's care for men, as moral agents. Of this ſort are all the impreſſions and intimations which we receive from nature, that is, from the hand of our Creator, for our government and direction as moral agents: the knowledge of the difference of good and evil, the power of conſcience, the paſſions of hope and fear, the ſenſe of honour and of ſhame, which are natural to all men, and may be ſaid to be born with them, are ſo many proofs of the care of God for us, conſidered as moral agents: and they are not the leſs ſo, for being common to all men; though poſſibly they have, for that reaſon, been leſs conſidered in this light.

Was God to ſpeak directly to every man, and teach him his duty, was he viſibly to rebuke every

ſinner, you would not doubt of his care for particular moral agents; but you might doubt, perhaps with good reaſon, how conſiſtent ſuch methods would be with the freedom which is neceſſary to the morality of human actions. But now, the ſame care is taken, the ſame inſtructions, the ſame admonitions given; with this only difference, that they are conveyed in a manner, and a method, which do not interfere with the freedom of moral agents. Conſider a little: When you find that you have a natural notion of the difference of good and evil, and conſequently of the great duties of morality, who then is your teacher and inſtructor? What you have from nature, you have from the Author of nature; and if your ſenſe of moral good and evil be indeed natural, you learnt it from God, and from him only. If the power of conſcience be natural to a rational mind, who is it that admoniſhes you when conſcience flies in your face? Muſt it not be he, who placed the power of conſcience in every rational mind, to act there as his deputy, in reſtraining, rebuking, and correcting every iniquity? When you are moved by a ſenſe of honour to do things that are virtuous and praiſeworthy, and encouraged and ſupported by hope of reward; when you are reſtrained from evil by the ſenſe of ſhame, or deterred by the fear of puniſhment; whence have you theſe great aſſiſtances and encouragements to virtue, theſe guards and defences againſt vice? If theſe are natural paſſions, and undoubtedly they are, it is God who calls you daily by theſe his meſſengers into the ways of honour and virtue, and warns you to flee from vice and iniquity.

Theſe are undeniable proofs of God's care for moral agents; and they reach to every particular man's caſe, who has not extinguiſhed the powers of conſcience, and the natural ſenſe of honour and ſhame.

That the providence of God over particular men extends ſtill farther, and often interpoſes to bleſs and proſper the righteous, to puniſh and confound the wicked, there can be no doubt in general, though it is always difficult, and generally preſumptuous, to pretend to judge in particular inſtances: for the appearances of things will not anſwer to the obſervation; the wicked being ſometimes ſuffered to triumph in this world, and virtue left to ſtruggle with many hardſhips and diſtreſſes: which is the caſe of the Pſalmiſt in the text, complaining that *God had forgotten to be gracious*; and has been, and, in the reaſon of the thing, muſt be the caſe of many righteous men in every age.

But this is not the only difficulty in the caſe: for when the wicked ſuffer here as they deſerve, and the righteous proſper in their undertakings; yet the bleſſings on one ſide, and the puniſhments on the other, ſeem to be conveyed by ſuch natural means, and ſo much to be expected from the common courſe of things, that men ſeldom think of an immediate interpoſition of Providence, and there are hardly grounds upon which to prove it. But, to balance this difficulty, let it be conſidered,

Firſt, That an immediate and viſible interpoſition of Providence in behalf of the righteous, and for the puniſhment of the wicked, would interfere with the freedom of moral agents, and not leave room for

their trial: and this is a ſufficient reaſon for not uſing this method.

Secondly, That this reaſon excludes only ſuch methods of rewarding virtue and puniſhing vice here, as are inconſiſtent with freedom of actions; but does by no means exclude any methods not liable to this objection.

Thirdly, That the natural courſe of things being under the direction of God, it is reaſonable to believe that they are oftentimes diſpoſed for the benefit of the righteous, and for the puniſhment of the wicked; though ſuch diſpoſition of things cannot fall under our obſervation, every thing appearing to happen according to a natural and ordinary courſe.

The firſt propoſition has been already conſidered; and the ſecond is but the immediate conſequence of it: of the third there can remain no doubt with any man, who believes that the providence of God has any concern at all in the affairs of the world. That whole nations may ſuffer by unſeaſonable weather, by ſtorms and tempeſts, by lightning or by earthquakes, is manifeſt in experience: that all theſe things, whenever they happen, are looked upon as natural events, is allowed: admitting then, that theſe things are under the government of God, and happen as he thinks fit to direct, the conſequence is manifeſt, that God can, whenever he pleaſes, puniſh wicked nations, or reward good ones, by a ſecret diſpoſition of the courſe of nature, without any ſuch interpoſition as is inconſiſtent with the method of his government over rational and moral beings.

And if this can be done, it is highly reaſonable to think it is done; it being in all its views agreeable to the goodneſs and juſtice of God, and not inconſiſtent with the government of moral agents. The truth of this obſervation is not confined to the caſe of nations only; it is the ſame with reſpect to particular perſons: there are a thouſand accidents in life (ſo we call them) upon which the fortunes of men depend: as theſe things happen one way or other, a man is made or undone; and how eaſy muſt it be for the power that preſides over all theſe accidents, to determine the fate of men, and at the ſame time to eſcape their obſervation! Though it be unreaſonable, becauſe inconſiſtent with the methods of the divine government over men, to expect from God, that he ſhould openly appear in the ſupport of good men; yet it is rational to expect, from his providence, *that all things ſhall work together* (which is the language of Scripture) for the *good* of thoſe who *love him.*

And this leads to another, and indeed the great difficulty of the caſe, which relates to the ſufferings of good men, and the ſuſpicion they are apt to entertain of God's kindneſs towards them, whilſt they ſuffer under the weight of his afflicting hand.

The complaints of this ſort to be met with in Scripture are of two ſorts: one regards the national calamities of the Jews; the other, the ſufferings of particular men.

The firſt made the ſubject of the Pſalmiſt's complaint in the text; as is probable from the concluſion of the Pſalm, in which he reckons up the great things formerly done by God for the deliver-

ance of his people; and concludes with one of the greateſt, *Thou leddeſt thy people like a flock by the hand of Moſes and Aaron.* His ſeeking comfort, from a remembrance of God's great kindneſſes to Iſrael, intimates, that his ſorrow was on account of their ſufferings.

But however the Pſalmiſt might be affected by the calamities of the people, to whom he was ſo nearly related; yet whoever reads the hiſtory of this people in their own books, will hardly think their ſufferings, as a nation, ſtand as an objection to Providence: they were under the higheſt obligations to obedience, and the moſt forward to diſobey of any other: and it appears, that as often as they repented of their iniquity, they were ſaved from ſuch deſtructions as ſeemed to leave no hope for their reſtoration. But the caſe of ſuffering nations in general, without conſidering the merit of any particular nation, is ſo intricated by a great variety of circumſtances, that it is hard to form a diſtinct judgment. The iniquity of a nation is made up of the iniquities of many; and, it may be preſumed, no nation was ever ſo bad, but that there were ſome good people in it: theſe, be they many or few, are involved in the general ruin, and their caſe makes a diſtinct difficulty. Now, though it be ſcarce poſſible for us, who can with no certainty judge of each other, to eſtimate the virtue and vice of nations, ſo as to ſay when they are ripe for deſtruction, yet there are ſome general obſervations, which lie within our reach, that will help to juſtify the providence of God in this part of divine government, and ſilence complaints on this head.

Firſt, There is a natural tendency in vice and immorality to weaken and deſtroy nations and governments; and, that it ſhould be ſo, is agreeable, in general, to the notion we have of God's juſtice and goodneſs.

Secondly, It is alſo agreeable to our ſenſe of juſtice and goodneſs, that nations, quite degenerate and corrupted, ſhould not be ſuffered to continue and proſper, and to ſpread their vice and iniquity by means of their power and authority.

Thirdly, Theſe principles allowed, the whole difficulty lies in the application of them to particular caſes; which application to particular caſes depending upon circumſtances which we cannot poſſibly know, the objection ariſes, not from the reaſon of the caſe, but merely from our ignorance of it: and where is the wonder, that there ſhould be many things in the adminiſtration of divine government, the reaſons of which we cannot comprehend? The general method of Providence, in exalting virtuous and ſober nations, in humbling the proud and profligate, is confeſſedly agreeable to juſtice; and no man can complain of it. There is no room therefore for any complaint at all, but when theſe rules of juſtice are miſapplied; and it is not only weakneſs, but great preſumption, to ſay theſe rules are in any caſe tranſgreſſed, becauſe it is a point in which human reaſon cannot judge. Whoever therefore enters into this complaint, may certainly ſay with the Pſalmiſt, *It is my infirmity.*

The miſeries of which good men have a ſhare in all public calamities will fall under the next

head, which relates to the private and particular ſufferings of good men.

Theſe complaints muſt be conſidered as made by others, in behalf of thoſe who ſuffer; or, as made by the ſufferers themſelves. When others make this complaint in behalf of the ſufferers, they evidently aſſume a fact for which they can have no proof, that the ſufferers are innocent righteous perſons: and, therefore, it is great weakneſs and infirmity in them to complain againſt Providence, upon ſuppoſition of a fact, of which they cannot poſſibly judge.

The characters of men, in the eye of the world, depend upon their outward behaviour; and when men behave ſo as to deſerve a good character, it is great want of candour and charity to ſuſpect them of evil: to treat them as deſerving ill, would be a direct violation of common juſtice: for ſince we have no way of judging men but by their outward conduct, to treat thoſe ill who appear to us to deſerve well, is acting againſt the only rule we have to direct us in the adminiſtration of juſtice. But when we judge of God's dealing with men, and call him to account for his juſtice, this rule, by which we are bound to judge and direct ourſelves, is a very unſafe one to follow, and may eaſily miſguide us: the reaſon is, becauſe, though we muſt take men's characters from the only rule we have to go by, their external behaviour, yet their true and real character, as to virtue and vice, is determinable only by their inward principles and ſentiments, which are known to God alone, *who ſearcheth the heart and reins.* To judge men to be wicked, be-

cauſe we ſee they are miſerable, would be acting without charity towards men: to judge them to be innocent, and therefore unjuſtly treated when they ſuffer, would be acting with great preſumption towards God. From which two conſiderations, the rule of our duty in theſe caſes muſt appear to be this, to treat men as they appear to us to deſerve, whether they are fortunate or unfortunate in the world; and forbear all cenſures upon divine Providence, which acts by rules of the higheſt juſtice, though undiſcoverable by us in particular caſes.

But farther, the man who ſuffers may be what you take him to be, a very good man; and yet his ſufferings no juſt occaſion for any complaint on his behalf. One good man ſaw this, and confeſſed it in his own caſe, *It is good for me that I was afflicted: before I was in trouble I went aſtray.* Even good men in this life want ſometimes admonitions to awaken their care, ſometimes trials to perfect their faith. And unleſs you can judge certainly (which moſt certainly you cannot do) of the end and purpoſes of Providence in permitting a good man to ſuffer, you can never, with any pretence of reaſon, paſs judgment upon the ways of God.

As this is true with reſpect to the temporary ſufferings of the righteous; ſo is it likewiſe true, even when the righteous are given up to deſtruction in this world, and periſh, in the eyes of the world, miſerably. Conſider the caſe of all the martyrs who have died for the teſtimony of God's truth: do you eſteem them as good men given up by God, without mercy, to ſundry kinds of cruel death? If you do not, it is evident, that good men

may ſuffer, even to death, without any juſt reflection upon the goodneſs of God.

The truth of the caſe is this; ſince all men muſt die, in the time and manner of death the difference cannot be great: and how hard ſoever it may be to reconcile ourſelves to death, to unnatural and violent death eſpecially; yet, upon the ſtricteſt ſcrutiny of reaſon, it can be no loſs to a good man, if there be any truth in religion, to be removed at any time out of this world into a better. And this will account for the caſe of the righteous, ſuppoſed to ſuffer in the deſtruction of a wicked nation: they fall indeed like other men; but they fall into the hands of God, who knows how to diſtinguiſh their caſe, and to compenſate all their miſeries. I am not recommending theſe kind of ſufferings to your liking, or trying to reconcile your natural ſentiments to them: this only I contend for, that, upon principles of reaſon and religion, no objection can lie againſt divine Providence on their account. But to proceed:

When the ſufferer complains in his own behalf, where is the man who will venture to put his complaint into this form, that a righteous man is ſuffering unjuſtly? We pray daily to God *not to enter into judgment with us*; and, I think, no man will care to begin, and enter into judgment with God: before he does, he muſt ſatisfy himſelf in theſe particulars; that he has been guilty of no offence to deſerve the puniſhment of ſufferings; that he is ſo perfect, as not to want the admonition of them; that he is ſo approved, as to want no trial.

Whoever can come to think of himſelf in this

manner, will not ſay of his own complaint, *It is my infirmity*; but if the reſt of the world ſay no worſe of him, they will deal very tenderly by him.

I have now gone through the general caſes which fall under my ſubject: as to the ſuſpicions about Providence, and the care of God over us, which have in them a mixture of religious melancholy, they are of another conſideration. They are indeed great infirmities, often they are great bodily infirmities, and deſerve all the compaſſion and aſſiſtance that can be given. But theſe diſorders do not uſually break out into objections againſt Providence, but rather turn upon the ſufferers themſelves, who are apter to judge hardly of themſelves than of God; and if they deſpair of mercy, it is becauſe they think themſelves unworthy of it. They belong not therefore to the preſent ſubject.

To conclude: You ſee how dangerous it is to ſit in judgment upon God, and to cenſure the methods of his government: in every government particular caſes have their particular reaſons: thoſe who know the reaſons and circumſtances of each caſe, may know whether the general rules of juſtice and equity are properly applied in the judgment and determination of the caſe. Others cannot poſſibly judge, though perhaps in the general rules of juſtice they may be well ſkilled. If this be true in human government, it muſt needs hold more ſtrongly in the government of God. One man may ſee what another man can ſee, and therefore may be capable of judging when he does right or wrong: but no man can ſee all that God ſees, and therefore no man is qualified to paſs judgment on particular

acts of Providence, which depend on circumstances out of the reach of human eyes. The great works of God which are before us, if duly attended to, declare his wisdom, goodness, and power; and the voice of nature, in all her works, speaks in the language of the wise king, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.* Happy are they who listen to this still voice! they will act not only the safest, but the most rational part; whilst others, full of themselves and their own wisdom, are daily condemning what they do not understand: and if ever they recover their right reason, the first step must be to see their weakness, and to join with the Psalmist in his humble confession, *It is my own infirmity.*

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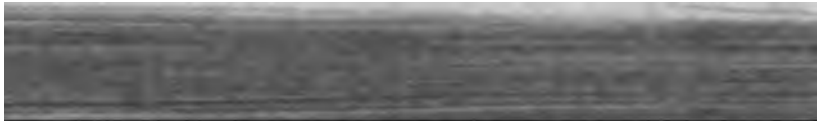
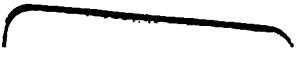
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